SERAPHIC
FEATHER
war
crimes
hiroyuki UTATANE
toshiya TAKEDA

Graphic Novel/Manga/Science Fiction

The Lure of Powerful Alien

Technology discovered on a buried alien starship on the dark side of the moon is the nexus for an international – even interplanetary – game of power, deception, and violence. The key players: Sunao Oumi, a young paranormal unwittingly caught up in the maelstrom; M-Zak, a beautiful – and lethal – super-agent; Kei Heidemann, Sunao's back-from-the-dead former love; and Apep Heidemann, Kei's brother, a mysterious scientist who has harnessed the alien craft's unimaginable power. M-Zak and Sunao are hot on the trail of vicious kidnappers who've taken Kei hostage, but the kidnapping is only part of a plot by the Dykstra Corporation to stage a coup and take control of the moon from U.N. forces, with a final goal to make the moon independent from earth!

"I found myself getting pulled in more and more with each page."

—Greg McElhatten, iCOMICS.com

SERAPHIC FEATHER

War Crimes

SERAPHIC FEATHER

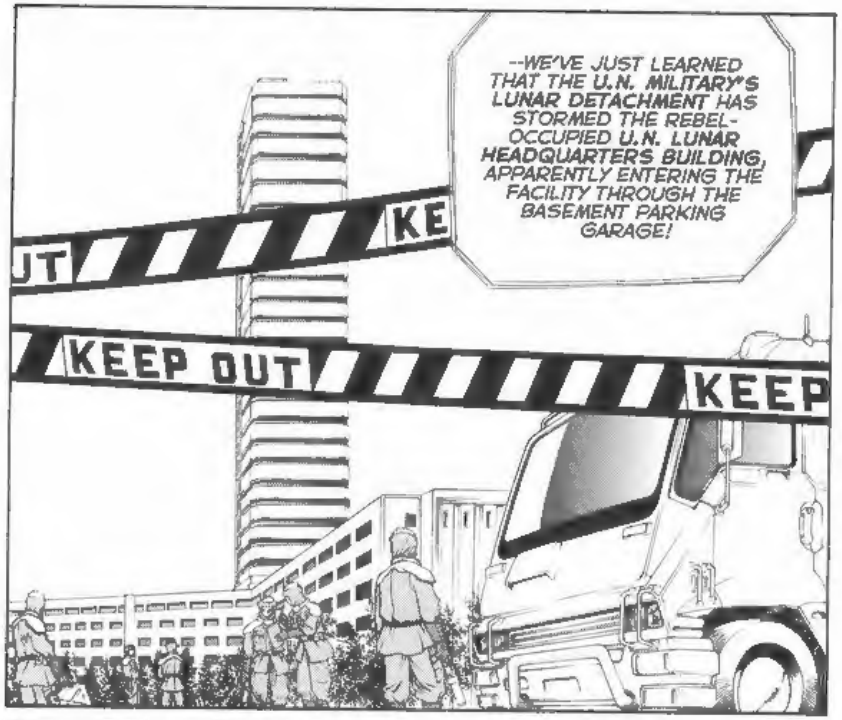
ACT 41

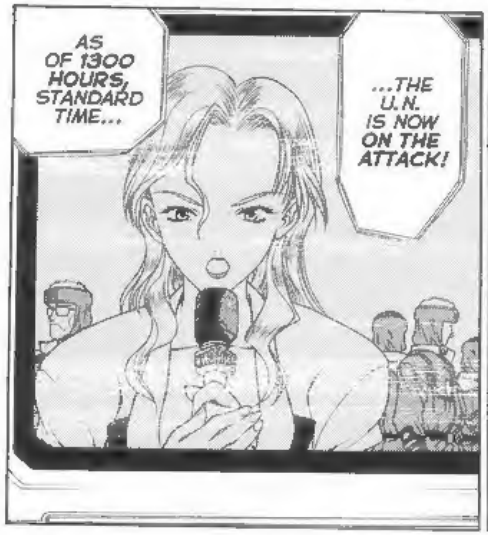
DOWN, SUNAO!
≠GKK≠
FMPP
KCHAK

WHSHH
SHNNG
WOOOSH
BRAKKA BRAKKA BRAKKA
BRAKKA

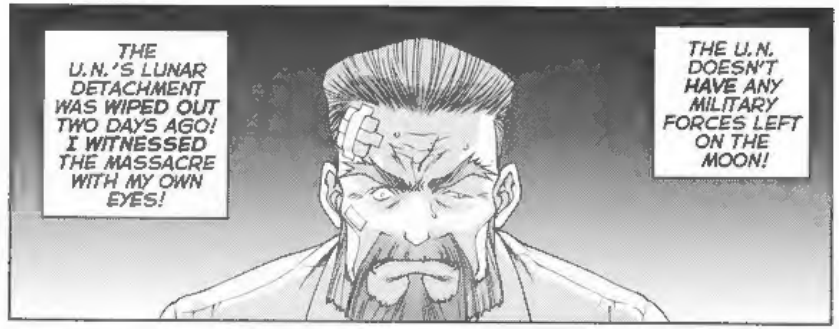
SHKK
SHKK
SHKK
WAOOOOOAH
CHOK
CHOK
KCHOK
WHAT THE HELL?!
TING
SHE CAN'T BE HUMAN--!
WHTT

SHAHE
MISS M-ZAK... YOU'RE AMAZING ...!
HEAVY-CALIBER ROUNDS DO HAVE THEIR USES...
...BUT THOSE BIG, SLOW BULLETS ARE JUST SO VERY EASY TO CUT!


--WE'VE JUST LEARNED THAT THE U.N. MILITARY'S LUNAR DETACHMENT HAS STORMED THE REBEL-OCCUPIED U.N. LUNAR HEADQUARTERS BUILDING, APPARENTLY ENTERING THE FACILITY THROUGH THE BASEMENT PARKING GARAGE!
KEEP OUT
KEEP


AS OF 1300 HOURS, STANDARD TIME...
...THE U.N. IS NOW ON THE ATTACK!

IT'S ABSURD... THIS CAN'T POSSIBLY BE TRUE...!

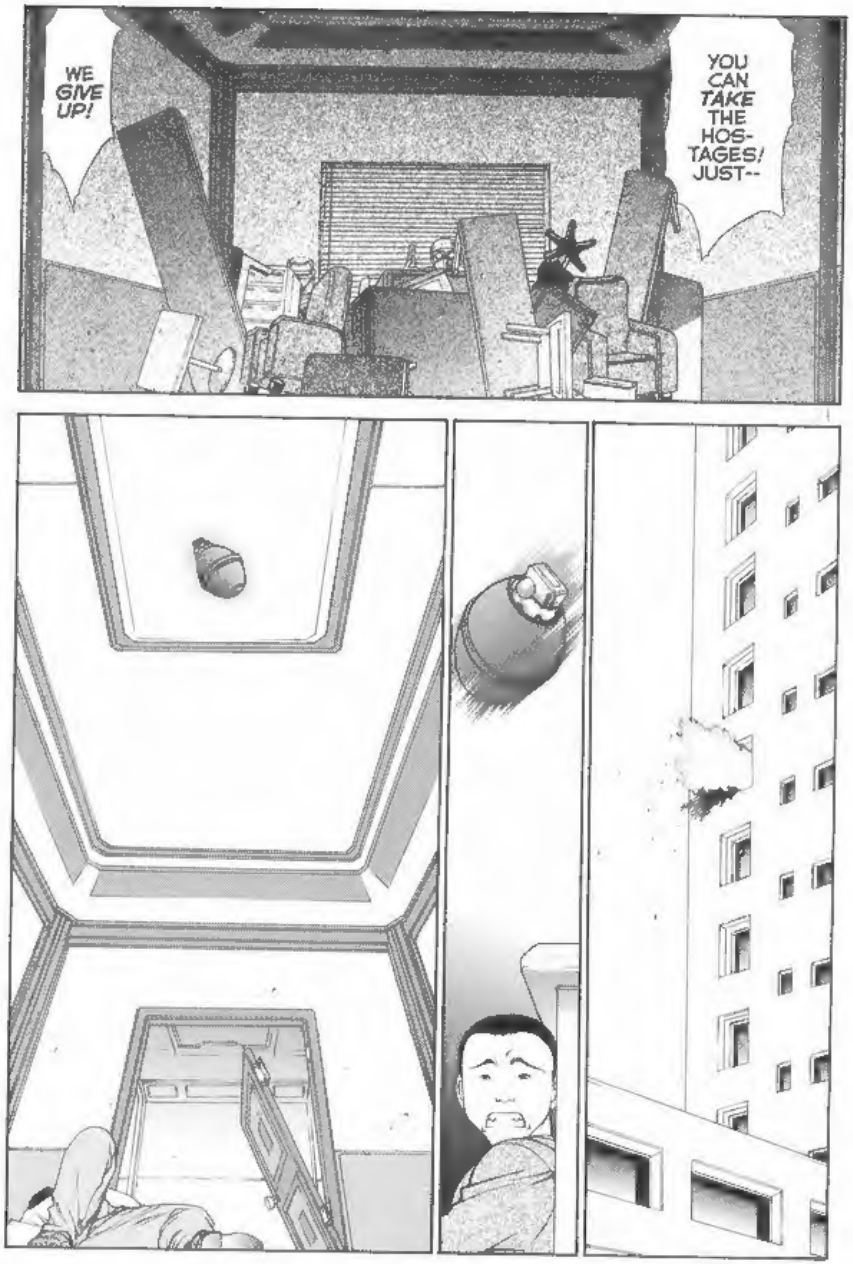

THE U.N.'S LUNAR DETACHMENT WAS WIPED OUT TWO DAYS AGO! I WITNESSED THE MASSACRE WITH MY OWN EYES!
THE U.N. DOESN'T HAVE ANY MILITARY FORCES LEFT ON THE MOON!

WHAT A SURPRISE, DON'T YOU THINK?

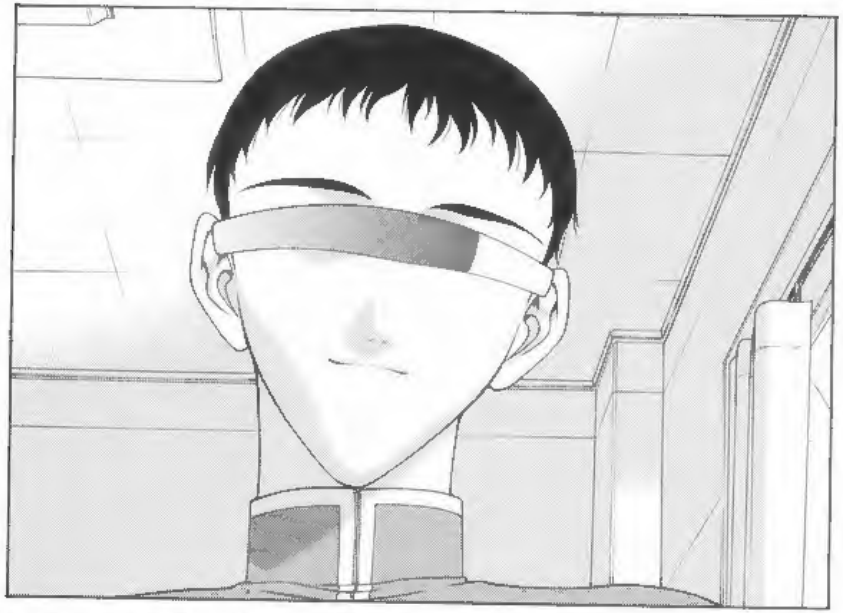
THE U.N. ISN'T JUST IGNORING THE REBELS' DEMANDS... THEY'RE SO EAGER TO PULL OUT THIS THORN, THEY'RE IGNORING THE DANGER TO THE HOSTAGES AS WELL!
IT'S ALMOST AS SURPRISING AS THE FACT THAT THE POWERS-THAT-BE AT THE U.N. DIDN'T OPT TO BUY THEMSELVES SOME TIME BY LEAKING WORD TO THE PUBLIC ABOUT THAT ANOMALOUS LITTLE INCIDENT IN THE PARK...!
SURELY REPORTS OF A THOUSAND TONS OF LABORATORY BEING TELEPORTED INTO A PUBLIC PARK WOULD'VE SERVED AS A FINE MEDIA DISTRACTION...!

YOU SEEM PRETTY DAMNED RELAXED ...
...CONSIDERING THAT YOU JUST HAPPEN TO BE ONE OF...
...THE THORNS ...?
AH... SO THAT'S YOUR GAME, IS IT?

WH KOOM
BRAKKA
SPAK SPAK
BRAKKA
AAAAA!!
BKAMM
KA-TOUS
N-NO... WAIT!
YOU WIN, OKAY?

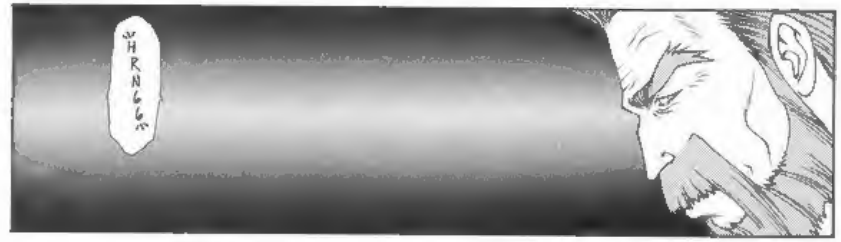

WE GIVE UP!
YOU CAN TAKE THE HOS-TAGES! JUST--

THOSE INHUMAN BASTARDS! THEY'RE BUTCHERING EVERYONE-- EVEN THE HOSTAGES!
NOW WE'RE SEEING THE TRUE FACE OF THE U.N.! THESE WAR CRIMES WON'T GO UNPUNISHED!
IT'S NO GOOD, SIR! THE COMM LINES ARE STILL BLOCKED!
GO THROUGH THE GRASSROOTS NETWORKS, THEN! USE ANYTHING! WE HAVE TO EXPOSE THESE U.N. ATROCITIES! WE HAVE TO SHOW THE PEOPLE OF BOTH WORLDS WHAT KIND OF FASCISM AND INJUSTICE WE'RE FIGHTING AGAINST!
WE'VE SHOWN THAT ALREADY, COMRADE CHAIRMAN... BUT RIGHT NOW, WE HAVE TO RETREAT, SIR...!
WE HAVE TO REGROUP OUR FORCES FOR FUTURE OPERATIONS...
WAIT A MOMENT... WHERE IS GIZEH...?
UH... WHO, SIR?
WHERE DID OUR SHADOWY FRIEND WITH THE GLASSES GO?



...
...
THESE SO-CALLED "U.N. ASSAULT TROOPS" ARE ACTUALLY DYKSTRA CORPORATION MERCENARIES IN DISGUISE... AREN'T THEY?
WELL.
REALLY, SIR... THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE, DOES IT?

IF THE SOLDIERS CURRENTLY ASSAULTING THE REBELS ARE, IN FACT, IMPOSTERS...
...THEN WHERE ARE THE REAL TROOPS OF THE U.N.'S LUNAR MILITARY DETACH-MENT...?


"HRNGG"

I'VE HEARD WHISPERS THAT THEY WERE RECENTLY DEPLOYED FOR SOME TERRIBLY HUSH-HUSH OPERATION...
...BUT SURELY THE U.N. WOULDN'T HESITATE TO REDEPLOY THEM HERE, WOULD THEY? SURELY THE ENTIRE UNIT COULDN'T HAVE JUST... DISAPPEARED!

DAMN THOSE INEPT FOOLS AT U.N. LUNAR HQ..!
THEY COVERED UP THE LUNAR DETACHMENT'S MASSACRE TO SAVE THEIR OWN SKINS...AND NOW SEE WHERE THEIR BOTCHED ATTEMPT AT DECEPTION HAS GOTTEN US!
THEY SHOULD HAVE GONE PUBLIC WITH A SANITIZED ACCOUNT OF THE INCIDENT, DISTRACTING THE MEDIA AND KEEPING THE REAL STORY UNDER WRAPS!
BUT WITH THE REAL UNIT'S FATE SWEPT UNDER THE RUG AND OFFICIALLY UNACCOUNTED FOR, WE CAN'T EXPLAIN THAT THESE ASSAULT FORCES AREN'T U.N. TROOPS!
HEADQUARTERS' IDIOTIC COVER-UP HAS LEFT US WIDE OPEN TO MANIPULATION BY THE DYKSTRA CORPORATION!
NOW, I SHOULD NOTE...
...I'VE HEARD CERTAIN HINTS THAT, FOR THIS ALLEGED COVERT OPERATION, THE U.N.'S LUNAR TROOP STRENGTH HAD BEEN BUILT UP IN CLEAR VIOLATION OF TREATY OBLIGATIONS...! OF COURSE, THESE ARE MERELY RUMORS...

...BUT IF THESE ACCOUNTS WERE IN FACT TRUE, I WOULD IMAGINE THAT THE U.N. WOULD BE DESPERATE TO KEEP THESE INCONVENIENT LITTLE FACTS SECRET...
"CALL THEM SPIES, INFORMANTS, OR JUST GOOD CITIZENS, OUR ASSETS AT DYKSTRA ARE KEEPING US VERY WELL INFORMED."
AND YET, YOU MIGHT CONSIDER ONE POSSIBILITY...
GOOD LORD... DYKSTRA EVEN KNOWS ABOUT THAT...?
...WHAT IF SAID PERCEPTION WAS, IN FACT, THE PRODUCT OF A DYKSTRA DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN?
YOU BUMBLING FOOLS... YOU'VE PLAYED RIGHT INTO DYKSTRA'S HANDS!

!
BEEEP
GIZEH HERE.
THOUGHT I'D LET YA KNOW... WE'RE SLUGGING IT OUT WITH THE SCARLET ANGEL RIGHT NOW.
WE'RE ABOUT TO SWITCH FROM TACTICAL SCENARIO SIX TO SCENARIO ELEVEN, OKAY?
UNDER-STOOD. I'LL TRUST YOUR JUDG-MENT.
RIGHT, THEN. I'M COUNTIN' ON YA, REMEM-BER...
BEEEP
SHEE-IT... HOW THE HELL DID THE LITTLE LADY FIND US, IN THE FIRST PLACE?
WELL, FROM NOW ON, WE'RE CLOCKING HAZARD PAY, BUDDY.
KLAK
KLAK
KLAK

VRRRRMB
?!
HUH? SO THEY'VE DECIDED NOT TO FIGHT ...?
I DOUBT IT, SUNAO... THEY HAVE TO KNOW THAT THEY CAN'T POSSIBLY OUTRUN US IN THAT
?
WHAT'S THAT...? I AN SENSE A VIBRATION RUNNING THROUGH THE TUNNEL...

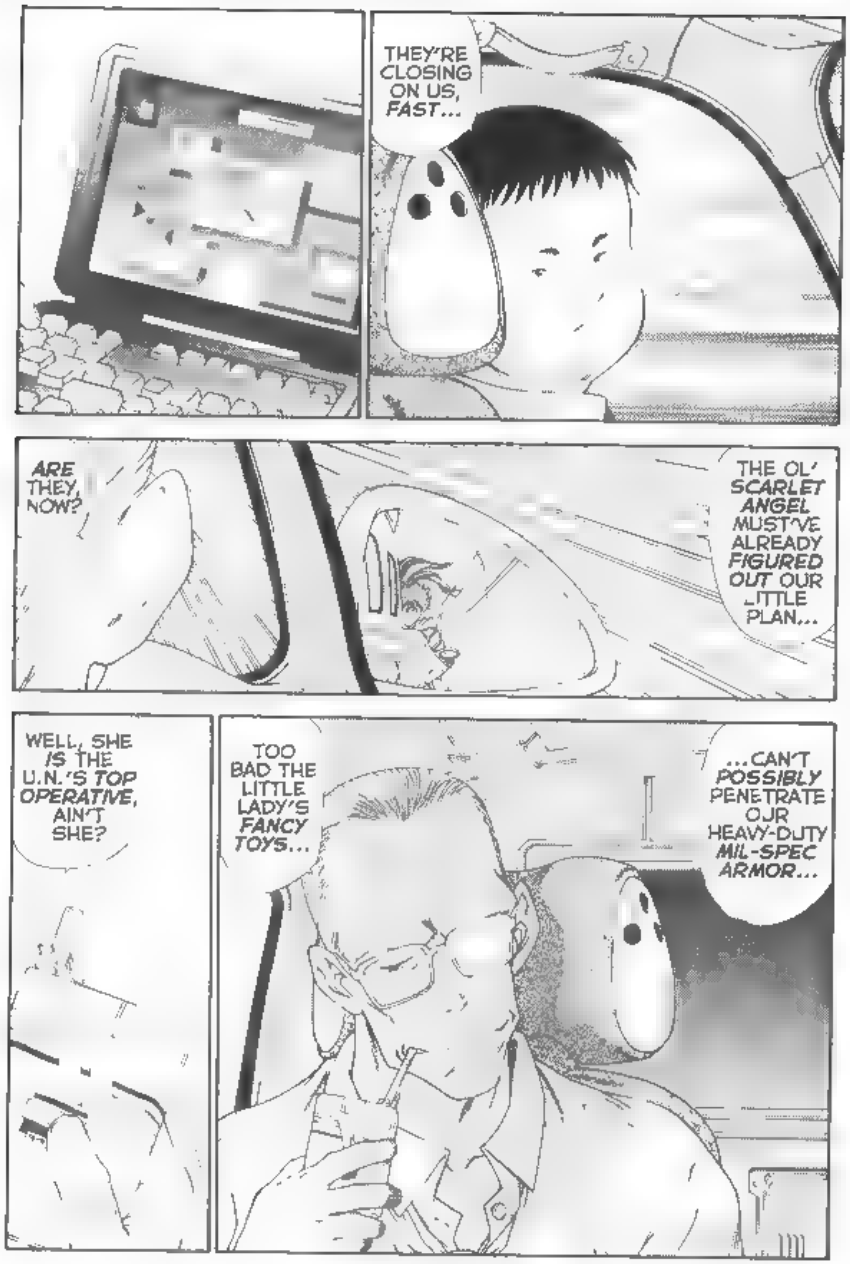
ACT 42

KCHUNGG
VRMMMM

WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF TIME. .
SUNAO!
Y YES?
PUNCH IT, OKAY?
GET ME WITHIN SWORD RANGE OF THAT AMBULANCE!
HUHP

B-BUT THEN YOU'LL BE TOO CLOSE TO BLOCK THEIR BULLETS, WON'T YOU...?
THEY'RE NOT GOING TO SHOOT AT US, SUNAO!
THEY'VE FOUND A BETTER WAY TO E_IM NATE US...
WH WHAT DO YOU MEAN...?
THEY'RE CLOSING THE BULKHEAD DOORS AHEAD OF AND BEHIND US, YOU SEE?
THEY'RE GOING TO SEAL OFF THIS SECTION OF TUNNEL AND EXPO E IT TO VACUUM!

THAT... THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE, MISS M-ZAK! THE TUNNELS' SECURITY SENSORS WILL SHOW THAT WE'RE IN HERE, WON'T THEY?
THEN THE AUTOMATED SAFETY SYSTEMS WILL KICK IN, AND CANCEL THE DE PRESSUR IZATION--
THINK ABOUT IT, SUNAO!
IF THEY HAVE ENOUGH SECURITY ACCESS TO REMOTELY OPEN AND CLOSE AIRLOCKS, THEY CAN EASILY OVERRIDE A FEW SENSORS!
BUT F I CAN CRACK THEIR VEHICLE'S PRES-SURE SEAL, THEY'LL HAVE TO STOP DEPRESSUR ZING THE TUNNEL! LET'S GO, SHALL WE?
YES, MA'AM!
VRR
RMB
ULPP
KRNEEE

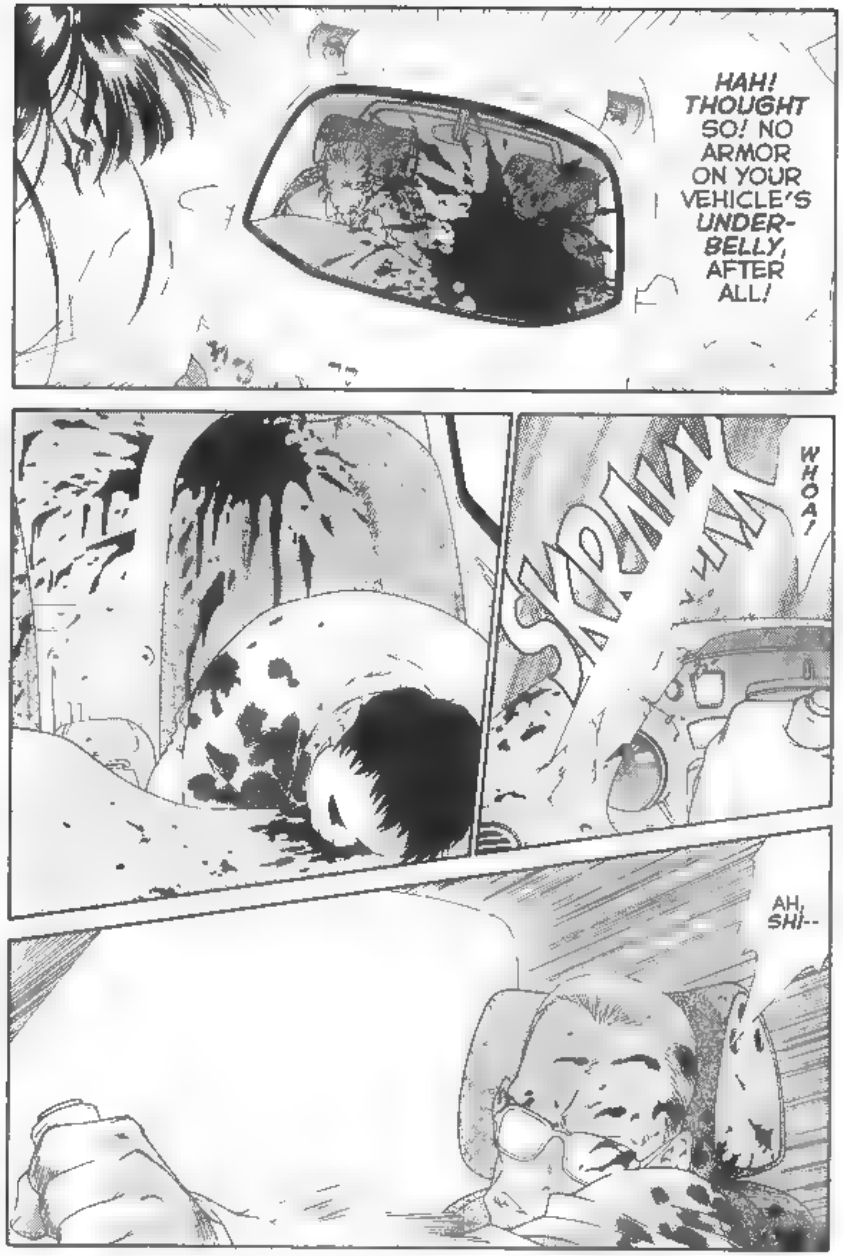

THEY'RE CLOSING ON US, FAST...
ARE THEY, NOW?
THE OL' SCARLET ANGEL MUST'VE ALREADY FIGURED OUT OUR LITTLE PLAN...
WELL, SHE IS THE U.N.'S TOP OPERATIVE, AIN'T SHE?
TOO BAD THE LITTLE LADY'S FANCY TOYS...
...CAN'T POSSIBLY PENETRATE OUR HEAVY-DUTY MIL-SPEC ARMOR...

SHINGG
SHINGG
A A !
LIKE YOU SAID, THEY'RE NOT SHOOTING... BUT IF THEY DON'T OPEN THEIR WINDOWS, HOW CAN WE GET TO THEM...?

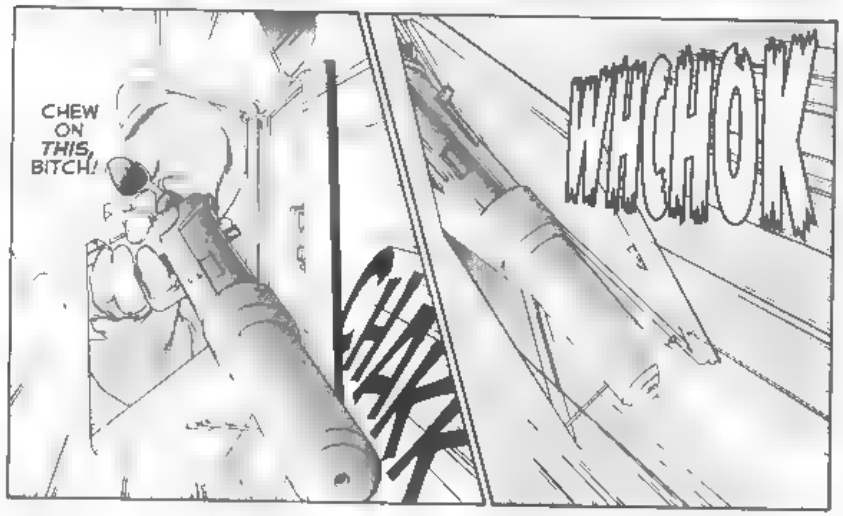
SHRAAA
DAMN IT!
AANGG
IF THEY DIDN'T HAVE KEI IN THERE, I'D TAKE OUT THEIR TIRES AND FORCE A ROLL-OVER, OR--
!
WAIT --!
THAT'S IT!
IN FRONT OF THEM...? OKAY... UNDER-STOOD, MA'AM!
YOU HAVE TO GET OUT IN FRONT OF THEM!
LISTEN TO ME, SUNAO!

TOO BAD THIS TANK'S CUSTOM MODS D.DN'T INCLUDE A HIGHER TOP SPEED, OR WE COULD JUST OUTRUN THESE PESTS, HUH?
HEY, DO YOUR WORST, HONEY... OUR ARMOR'S JUST AS HEAVY IN FRONT AS IT .S IN BACK...

WHSHINGG
SHUNK
*HGKK!
SPANGG


HAH! THOUGHT SO! NO ARMOR ON YOUR VEHICLE'S UNDER-BELLY, AFTER ALL!
SKRAM
WHOA!
AH, SHI--

SKREEEEK


CHEW ON THIS, BITCH!
CHAK
WHACHOK

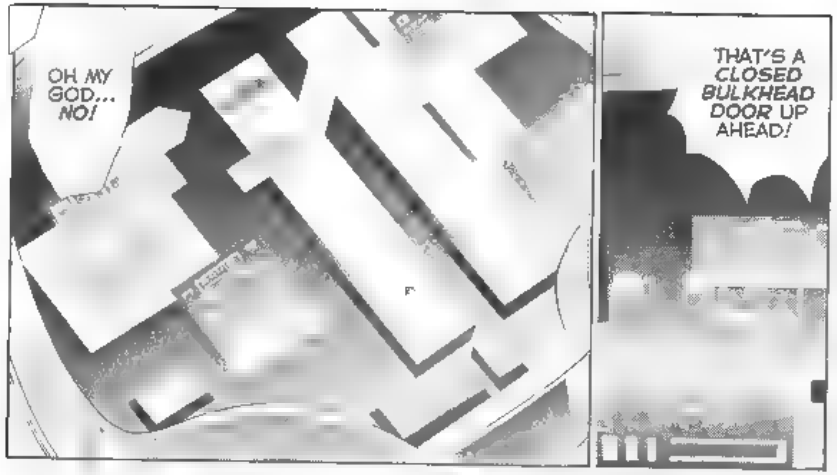
GYAAAA
SHAK
SKRAKK

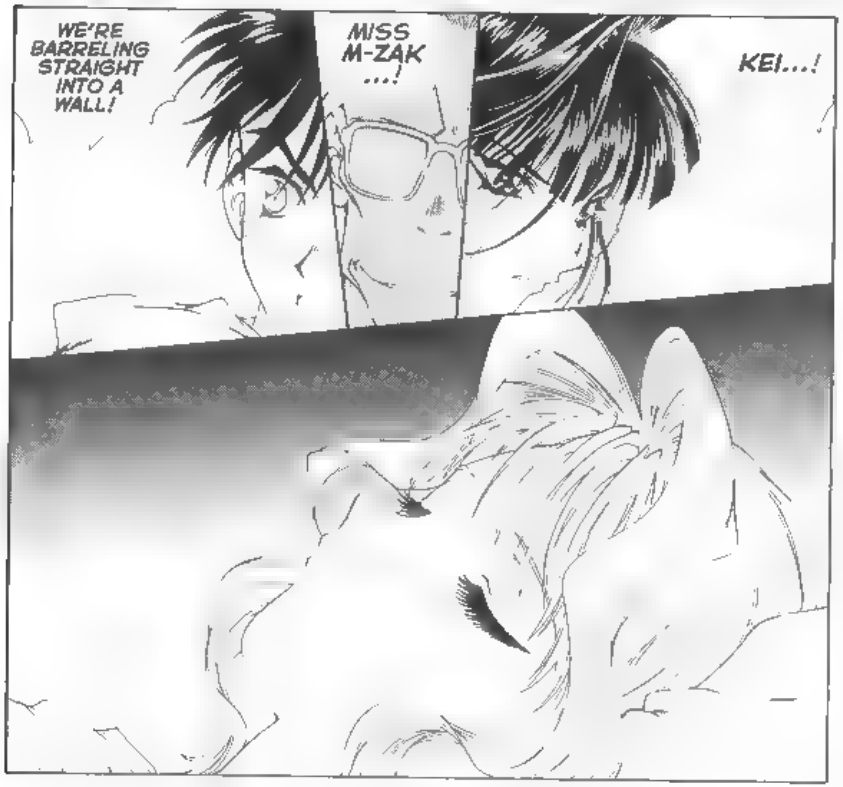
SNAPP
SKEEE
KRANGG

HOW THE HELL DID SHE DO THAT ?!
SHWINGG

END OF THE ROAD, I'M AFRAID.
NOW, PULL OVER TO THE--
OH, NO... THE AIRLOCK DOORS...!
THEY'VE OPENED THE TUNNEL TO VACUUM!

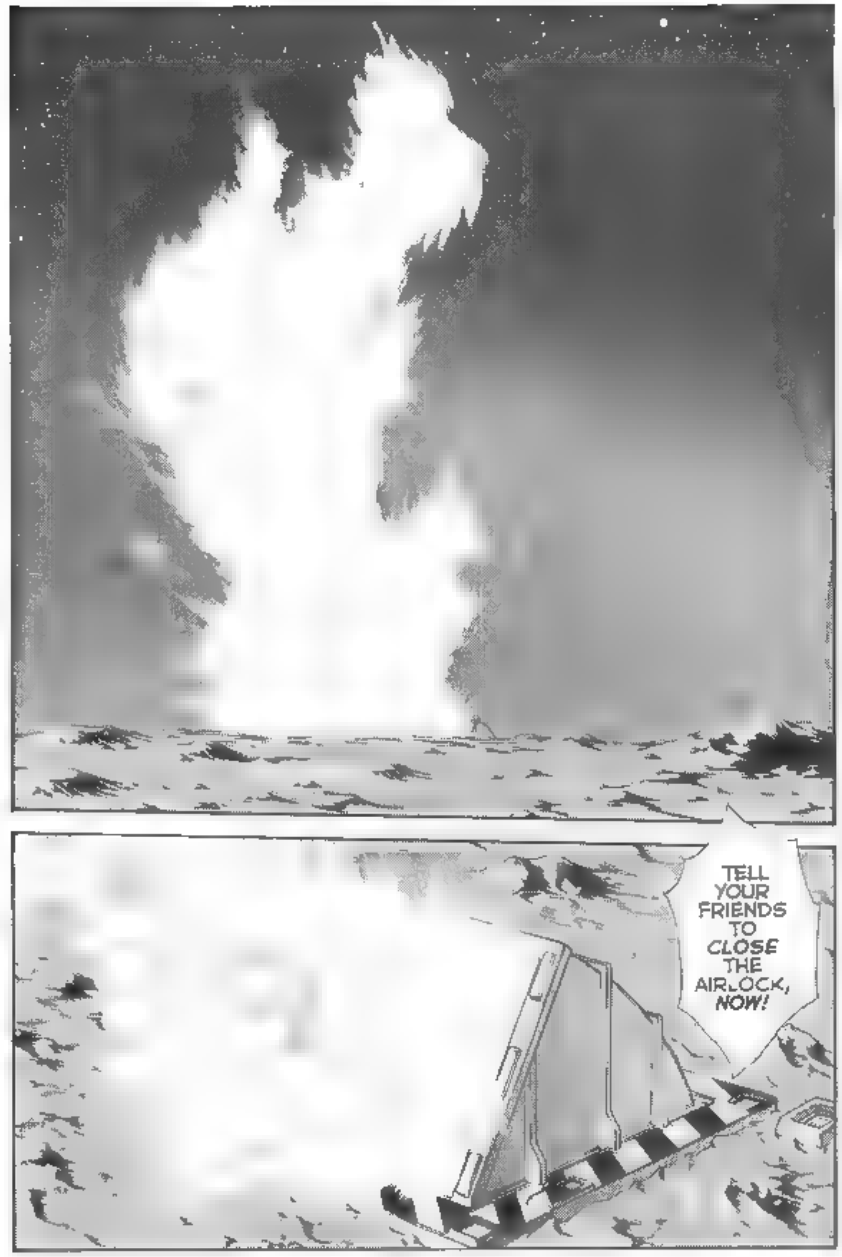
FSHOOOOM
WHERE IS IT...?
THERE HAS TO BE AN EMERGENCY EXIT OUT OF HERE...THERE MUST BE!
BETTER CHECK THE MAP DISPLAY...!
OR MAYBE THERE'S A PRES-SURIZED EMERGENCY SHELTER SOMEWHERE ALONG THE TUNNEL WALL...?
BREEP
THERE! THAT MUST BE--
?!


OH MY GOD... NO!
THAT'S A CLOSED BULKHEAD DOOR UP AHEAD!


WE'RE BARRELING STRAIGHT INTO A WALL!
MISS M-ZAK ...!
KEI...!

ACT 43

FSHOOM


TELL YOUR FRIENDS TO CLOSE THE AIRLOCK, NOW!

HMM ..?
IF THEY DON'T, YOU'LL BE SUCKING VACUUM WITHIN A MATTER OF MINUTES--!

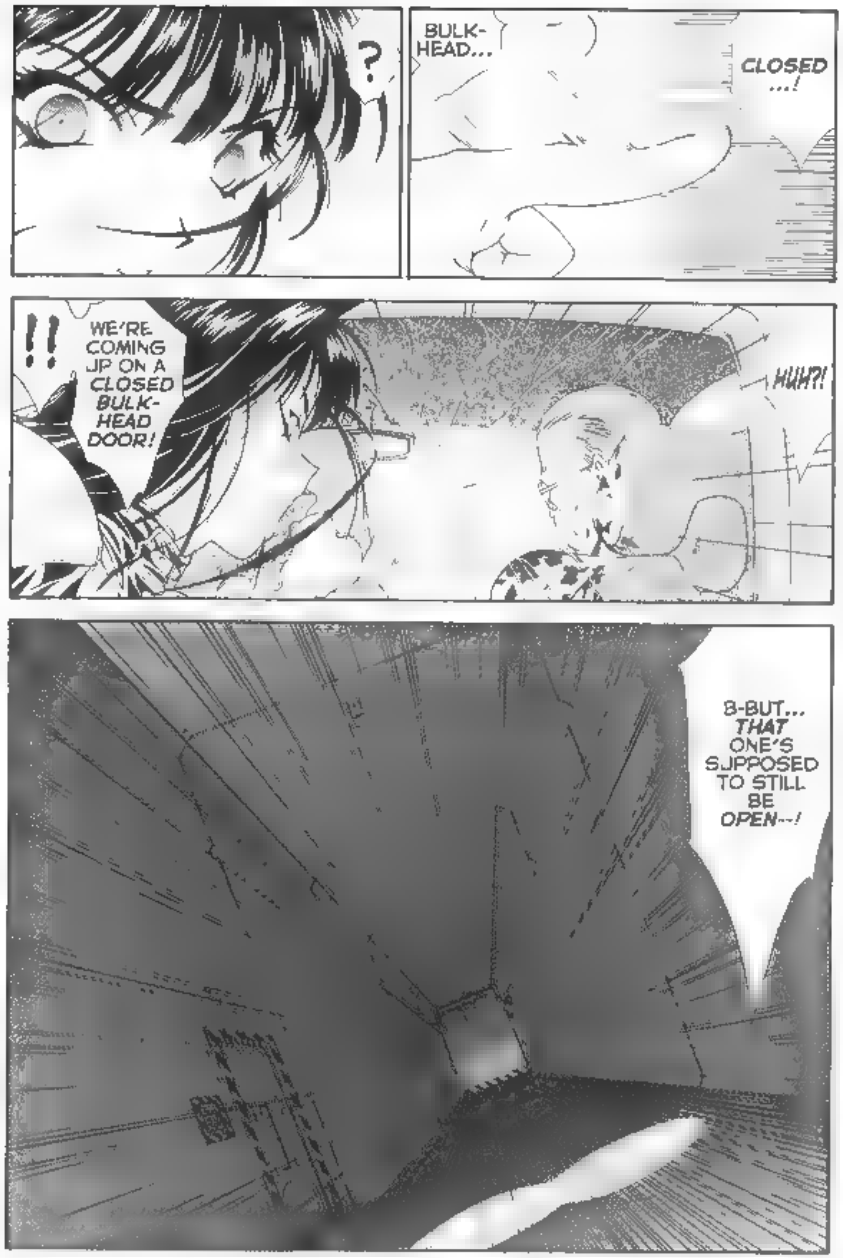
NAH, CAN'T DO THAT... BUT, HEY, THANKS FOR CARING, HONEY.
HEAH
DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME, THOUGH... I CAN HANG OUT IN A VACJUM JUST FINE.

WHAT?! IS HE A CYBORG? OR IS HE EMPOWERED BY ALIEN TECHNOLOGY...?
WELL, YOU MAY SURVIVE... BUT WHAT ABOUT YOUR PRIZE? WHAT ABOUT KEI...?
OH, YOU MEAN LI'L MISS HEIDE-MANN ...?

I'M THINKING SHE'LL BE JUST DANDY... SHE DOES HAPPEN TO BE A SERAPH... DOESN'T SHE?

WO

FWDD
FWDD
SUNAO?!
M...
M...
MISS...
M-ZAK...
L-LOOK
OUT...
IN
FRONT...
OF
YOU...
CLOSED!


?
BULK-
HEAD...
CLOSED
...!
!!
WE'RE
COMING
UP ON A
CLOSED
BULK-
HEAD
DOOR!
HUH?!
B-BUT...
THAT
ONE'S
SUPPOSED
TO STILL
BE
OPEN--!

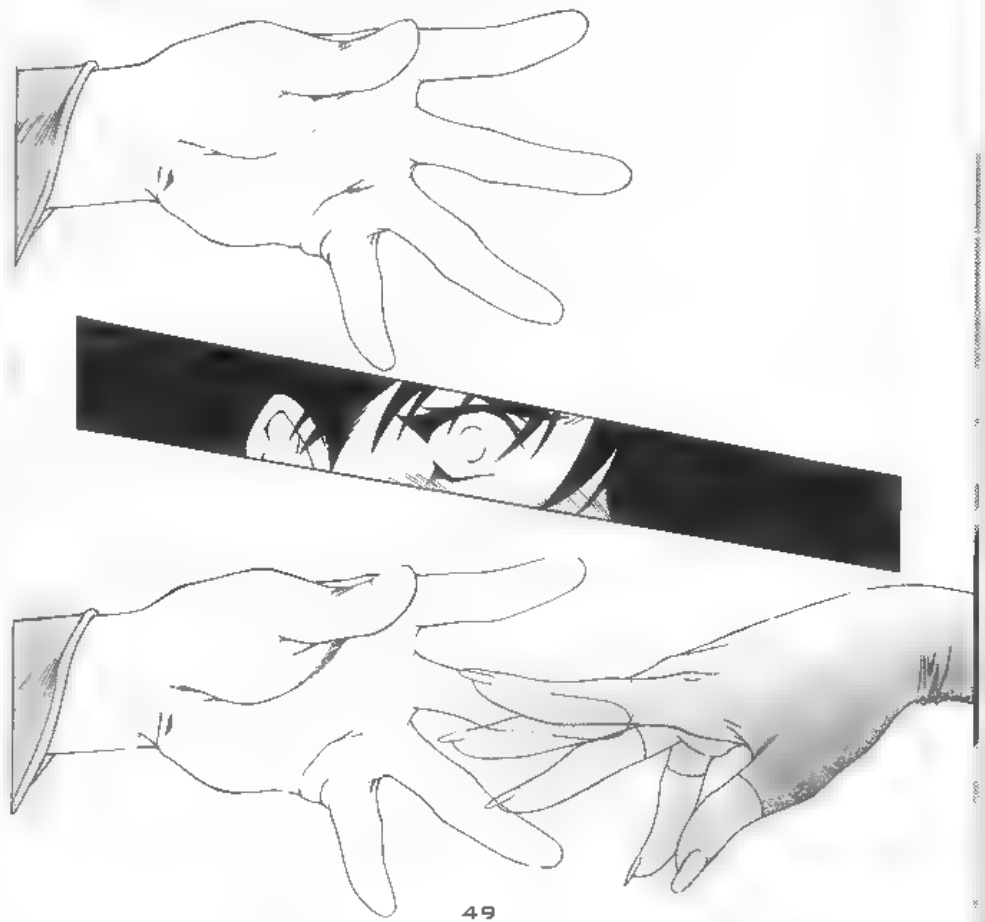
GYAAAA!
SKREEEEEEE
A-8
A-7
CLOSED

SKREEEK
AAA!
WHIMPER
SNAPP
KEI!

HGRK
I CAN'T LEAVE KEI...

...BUT MAYBE SUNAO...
M-ZAKI!!
...CAN'T LEAVE HER TO DIE ALONE...

SUNAO, NO!! HIT THE BRAKES!! DON'T TRY TO--



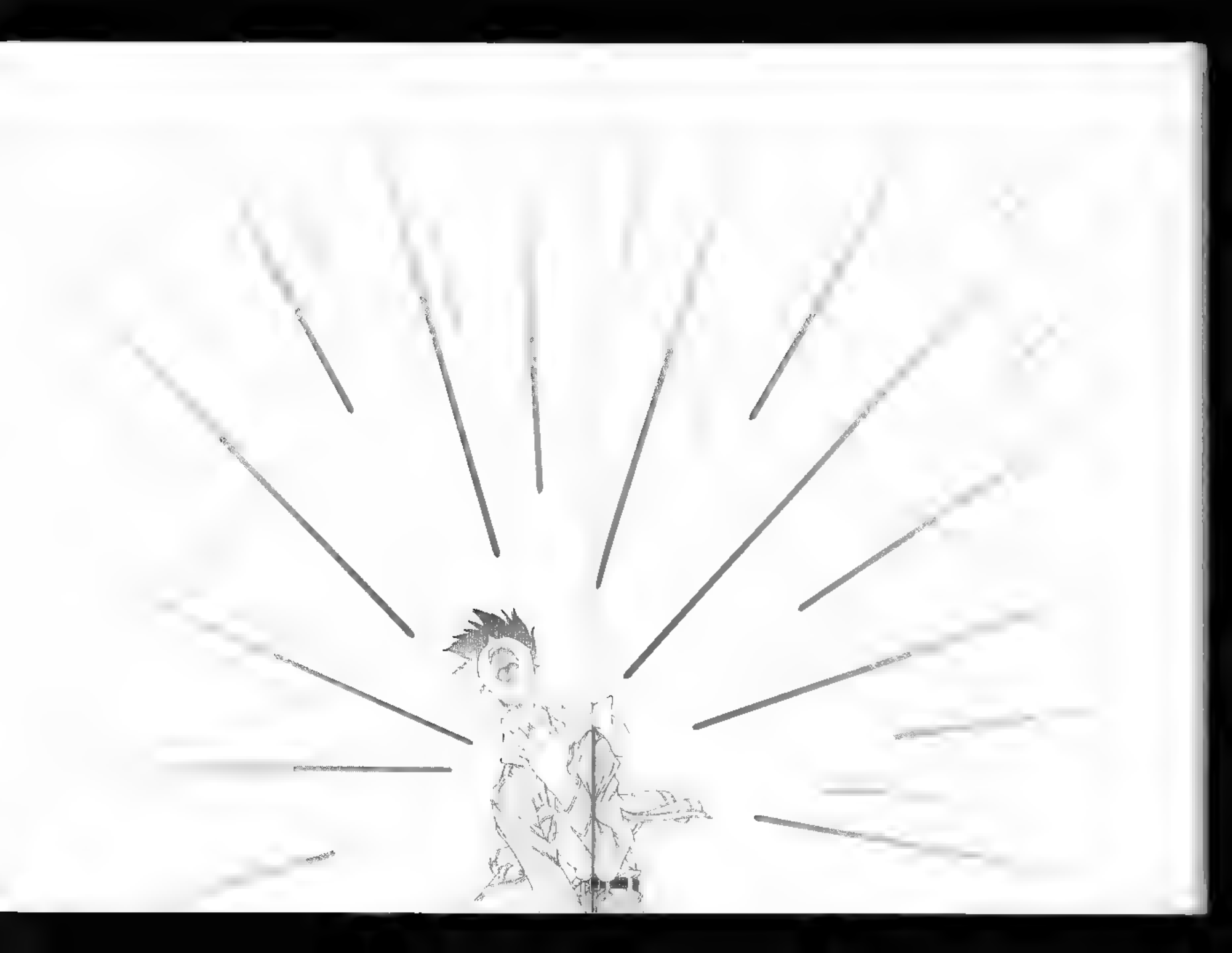
KEI!

M-ZAK!

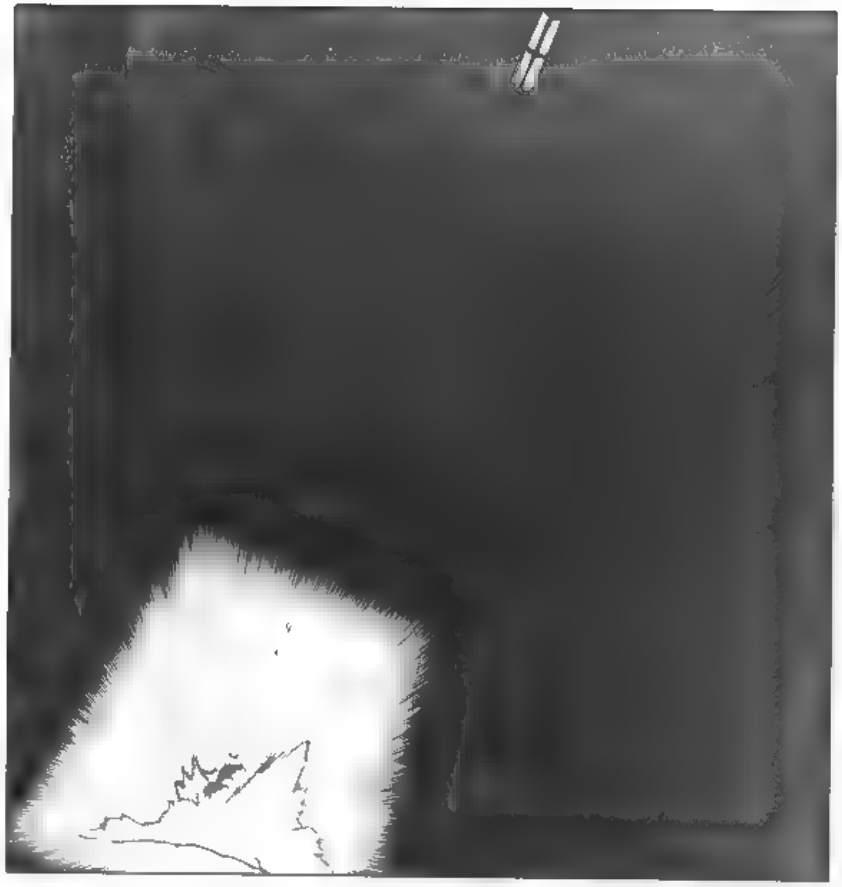
KEI!

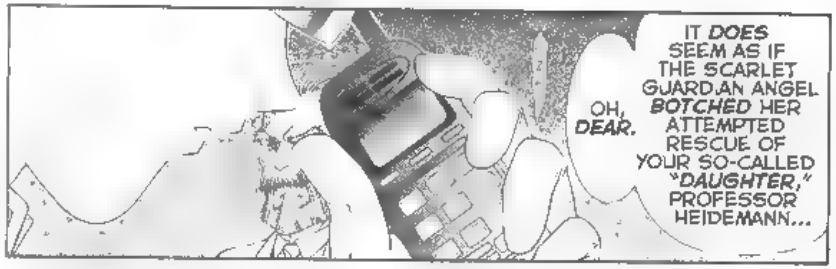
M-ZAK!

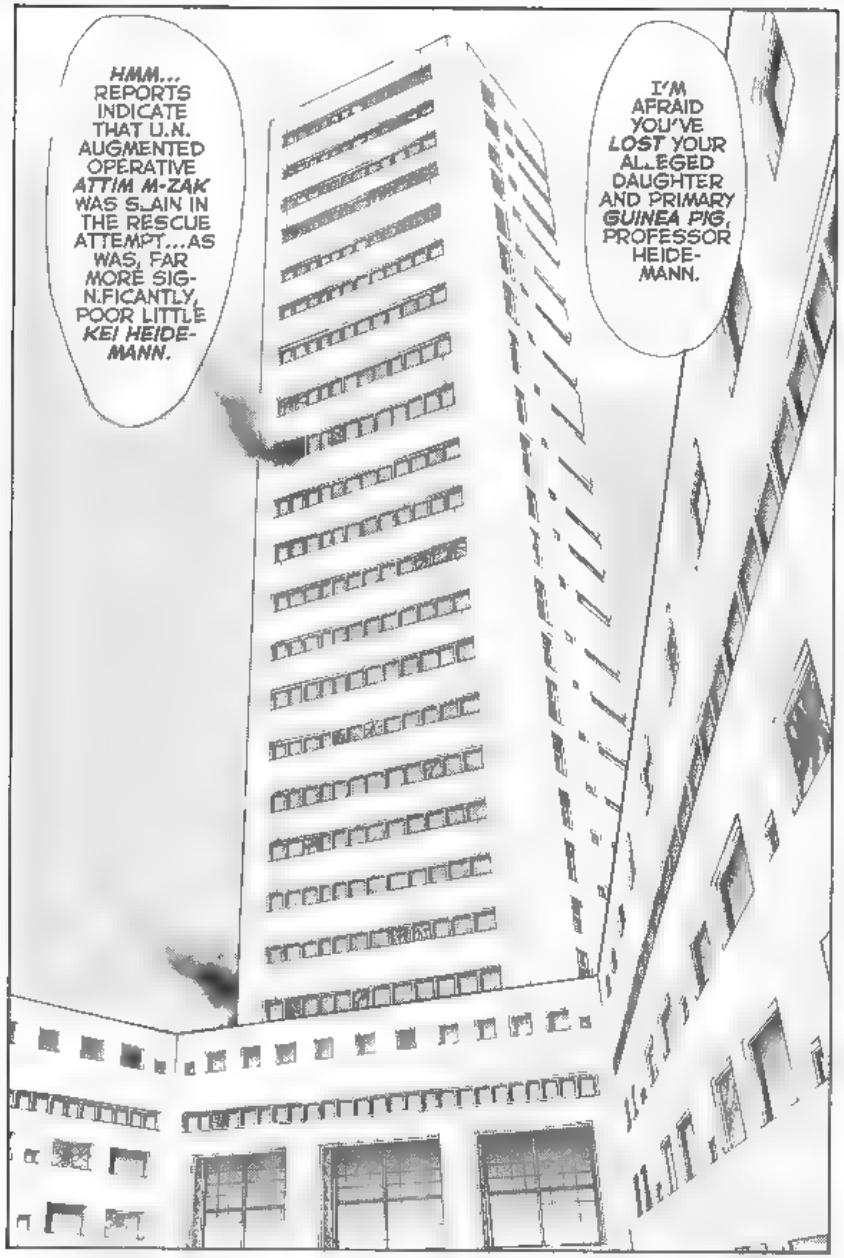
KEI!!



Act 44




OH, DEAR.
IT DOES SEEM AS IF THE SCARLET GUARDIAN ANGEL BOTCHED HER ATTEMPTED RESCUE OF YOUR SO-CALLED "DAUGHTER," PROFESSOR HEIDEMANN...


HMM... REPORTS INDICATE THAT U.N. AUGMENTED OPERATIVE ATTIM M-ZAK WAS SLAIN IN THE RESCUE ATTEMPT...AS WAS, FAR MORE SIGNIFICANTLY, POOR LITTLE KEI HEIDEMANN.
I'M AFRAID YOU'VE LOST YOUR ALLEGED DAUGHTER AND PRIMARY GUINEA PIG, PROFESSOR HEIDEMANN.

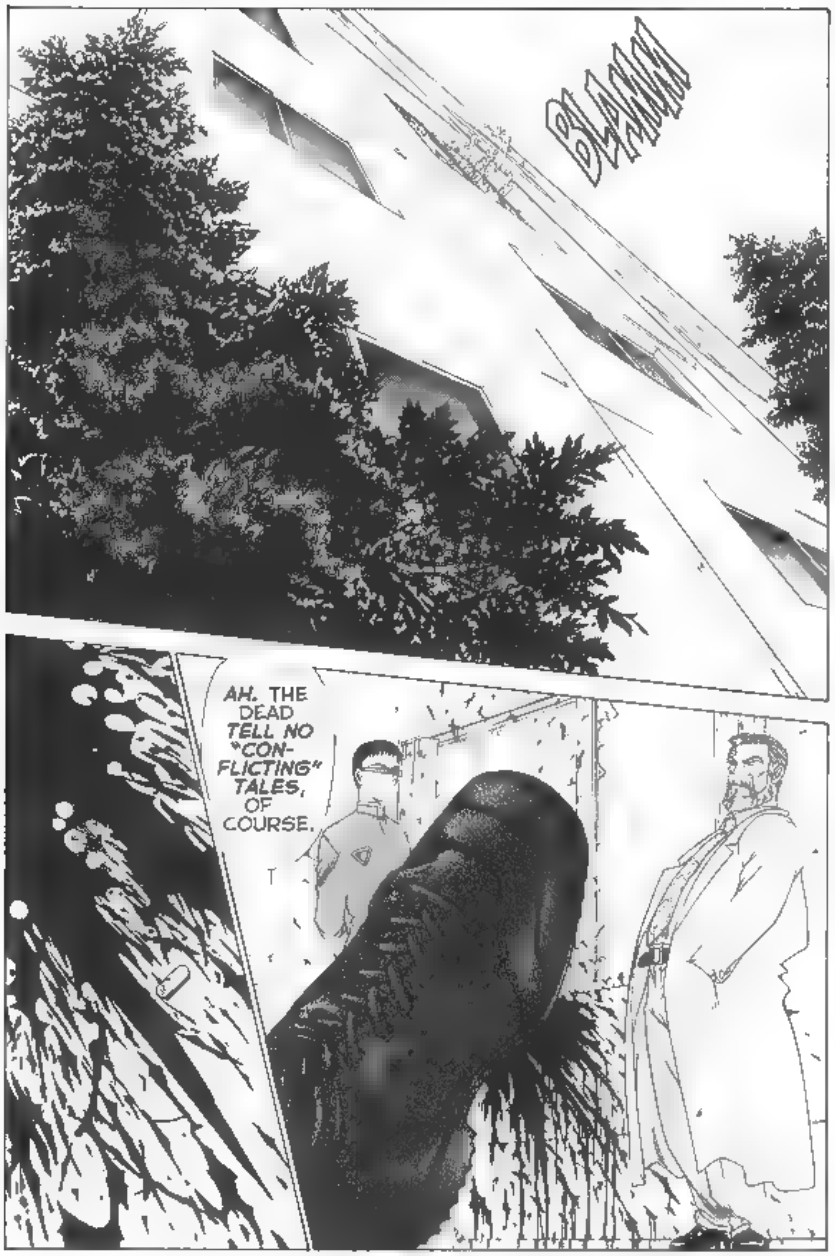
HA!
NOW I COULDN'T POSSIBLY CONTINUE MY RESEARCH EVEN IF I DID SIGN UP WITH YOU!
OR PERHAPS YOU CAN COME UP WITH SOME OTHER IDEAL TEST SUBJECTS, EH?
I DO HAVE ONE PARTICULAR TEST SUBJECT IN MIND...
...BUT GIVEN THE TWO SENTINELS HE HAS FOR GUARD DOGS, HE'D NO DOUBT BE TOO DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO ACQUIRE...!

AH,
I GRASP YOUR MEANING, PROFESSOR.
YOU WISH TO, AH, RECOVER YOUR ESTRANGED SON, APEP, I TAKE IT.
HMM.
ACTUALLY, I THINK THAT COULD BE ARRANGED... WITH [redacted] COOPERATION, OF COURSE.
WHAT? ARE YOU SERIOUS ...?
GIZEH!

GIZEH! WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THIS?
I THOUGHT THAT ALL THE U.N. FORCES OPERATING IN THIS DISTRICT WE[redacted] DESTROYED!
WELL, YOU DO SEEM TO HAVE BEEN INCORRECT IN THAT ASSUMPTION, COMRADE CHAIRMAN. PITY.
THEY'RE SLAUGHTERING OUR TROOPS ON THE LOWER FLOORS! HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN--?!
SO U.N. FORCES ARE PERPETUATING BARBARIC ATROCITIES RIGHT NOW, ARE THEY? HOW, DARE I SAY, ATROCIOUS ...!
!
HNRRG!

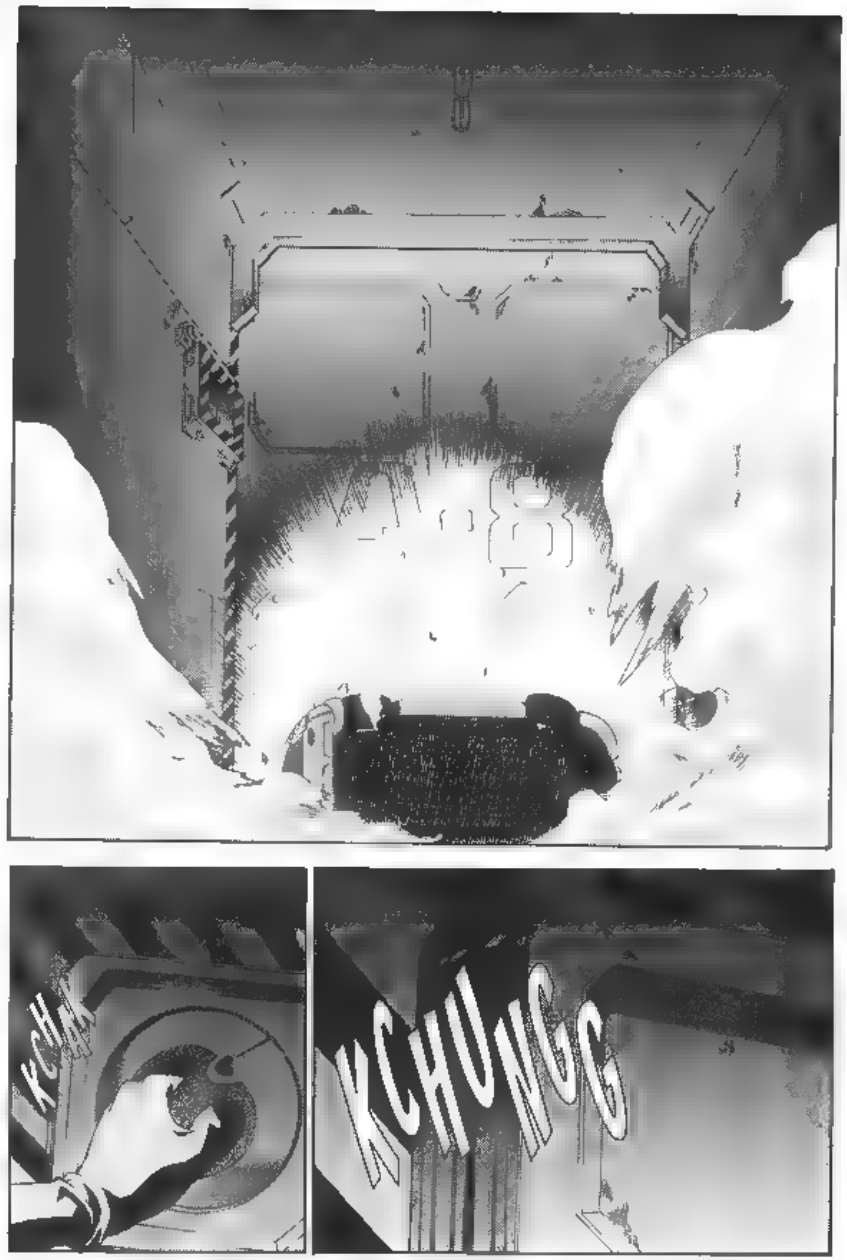
YOU SEEM PRETTY DAMN CALM, GIZEH...
YOU KNEW THIS WAS GOING TO HAPPEN, DIDN'T YOU?
YOU SHOULD BE PROUD, COMRADE CHAIRMAN.
WHAT?
AFTER HEROICALLY--IF QUIXOTICALLY--SEIZING A U.N. FACILITY TO PROTEST THE EARTH'S APPALLING BRUTALITY, YOU END UP DYING A MARTYR'S DEATH FOR YOUR IDEALS.
THIS WILL OF COURSE SET THE [illegible] BURGEONING ANTI-U.N. MOVEMENT ABLAZE, COMRADE CHAIRMAN
NOW I SEE...DYKSTRA CORPORATION COVERTLY SUPPORTED THESE "LUNAR LIBERATION COUNCIL" FANATICS SOLELY IN ORDER TO SACRIFICE THEM AND FOMENT ANTI-U.N. SENTIMENT...!
AND AFTER ALL... ISN'T THAT WHAT YOU WANTED?

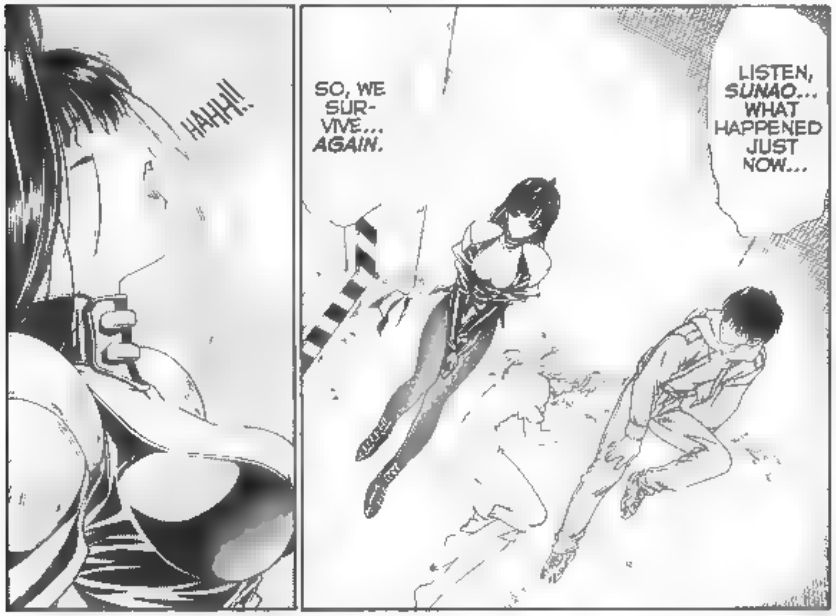
WHY, YOUR NAME WILL RESOUND THROUGHOUT THE ANNALS OF LUNAR HISTORY AS A TRUE PATRIOT... WILL IT NOT?
DAMN YOU, GIZEH!!
DO CALM DOWN, PLEASE. HYSTERIA IS MOST UNBECOMING OF A DEAD HERO...
YOU SLIMY BAS-TARD! I'LL--
?!


BLAM!!!
AH. THE DEAD TELL NO "CONFLICTING" TALES, OF COURSE.

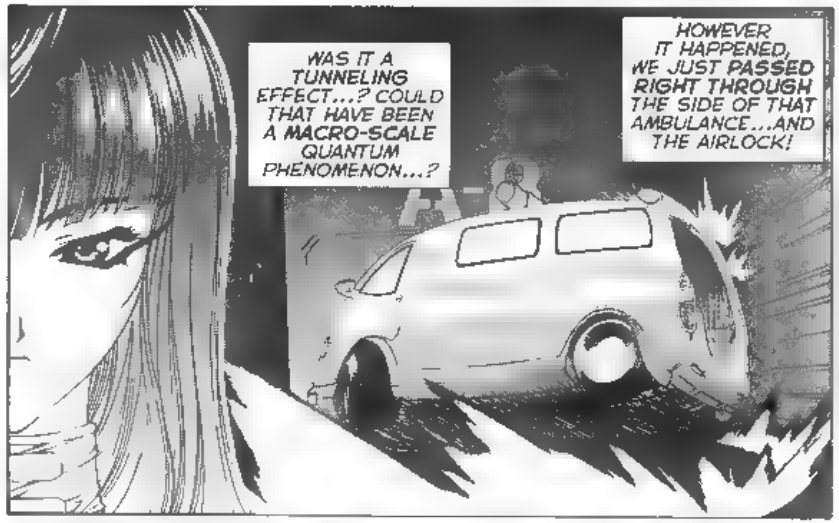
SO...WILL THAT BE MY FATE, ONCE I'VE SERVED MY PURPOSE...?
OH, HEAVENS, NO! IF YOU COOPERATE WITH US, SIR, YOU WILL PROFIT FROM THE EXPERIENCE... IN EVERY SENSE OF THE TERM.
PARDON, PROFESSOR, BUT I MUST NOW HASTEN TO ARRANGE THE LAST ACT OF THIS LITTLE MORALITY PLAY, YOU UNDERSTAND.
AH!
I NEVER PROPERLY INTRODUCED MYSELF, DID I? I'M SAUS GIZEH... YOUR HUMBLE SERVANT, SIR.
I'LL BE IN TOUCH LATER, PROFESSOR. FOR NOW, PLEASE ACCEPT THIS INVITATION, WON'T YOU?
WE'VE ARRANGED A PRIVATE UNVEILING OF A CERTAIN... ASSET... THAT MIGHT BE OF INTEREST TO YOU.
FWAPP
HMFF!
A "PRIVATE UNVEILING," EH...?
!!

NO! TH-THIS CAN'T BE--!


KCHK
KCHUNGG


HAHH!!
SO, WE SUR-VIVE... AGAIN.
LISTEN, SUNAO... WHAT HAPPENED JUST NOW...

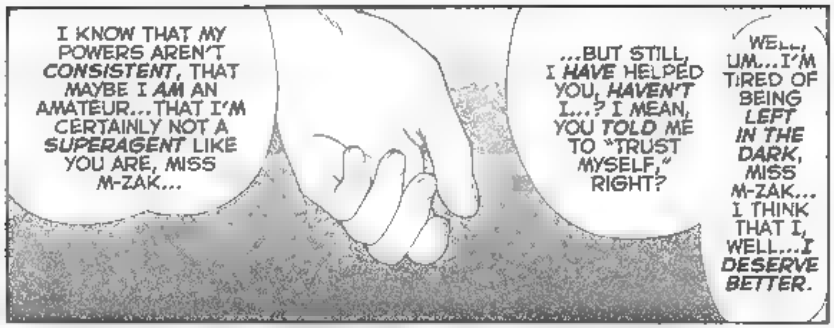
...WAS THAT YOUR POWERS AT WORK...?
I...I JUST DON'T KNOW, MISS M-ZAK...


WAS IT A TUNNELING EFFECT...? COULD THAT HAVE BEEN A MACRO-SCALE QUANTUM PHENOMENON...?
HOWEVER IT HAPPENED, WE JUST PASSED RIGHT THROUGH THE SIDE OF THAT AMBULANCE...AND THE AIRLOCK!

KEI WAS STILL UNCONSCIOUS... SO THIS MUST HAVE BEEN SUNAO'S DOING.
AND YET...
...AS FAR AS I KNOW, THE ONLY BEINGS THAT CAN WALK THROUGH WALLS LIKE THAT ARE... THEM.

BUT THAT'S RIDICU-LOUS... SUNAO ISN'T A SENTINEL ...!
UM, EXCUSE ME...MISS M-ZAK...?
HAHH?
OH... YES, SUNAO ?

JUST NOW... I DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT I DID..OR HOW I DID IT...
...BUT I STILL MANAGED TO SAVE US, DIDN'T I? THAT'S WORTH SOMETHING, ISN'T IT?
EVEN IF I HAVEN'T A CLUE WHY I CAN SOMETIMES DO THINGS LIKE THAT... AND OTHER TIMES I CAN'T...!


I KNOW THAT MY POWERS AREN'T *CONSISTENT*, THAT MAYBE I *AM* AN AMATEUR...THAT I'M CERTAINLY NOT A *SUPERAGENT* LIKE YOU ARE, MISS M-ZAK...
...BUT STILL, I *HAVE* HELPED YOU, *HAVEN'T* I...? I MEAN, YOU *TOLD* ME TO "TRUST MYSELF," RIGHT?
UM...I'M TIRED OF BEING *LEFT IN THE DARK*, MISS M-ZAK... I THINK THAT I, WELL...*I DESERVE BETTER.*

WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO *SAY*, SUNAO...?
I WANT YOU TO TELL ME EXACTLY *WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON*, MISS M-ZAK. . TELL ME ABOUT *EVERYTHING* TELL ME ABOUT *KEI.*

...DO YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW KEI'S SECRET...?

ACT 45

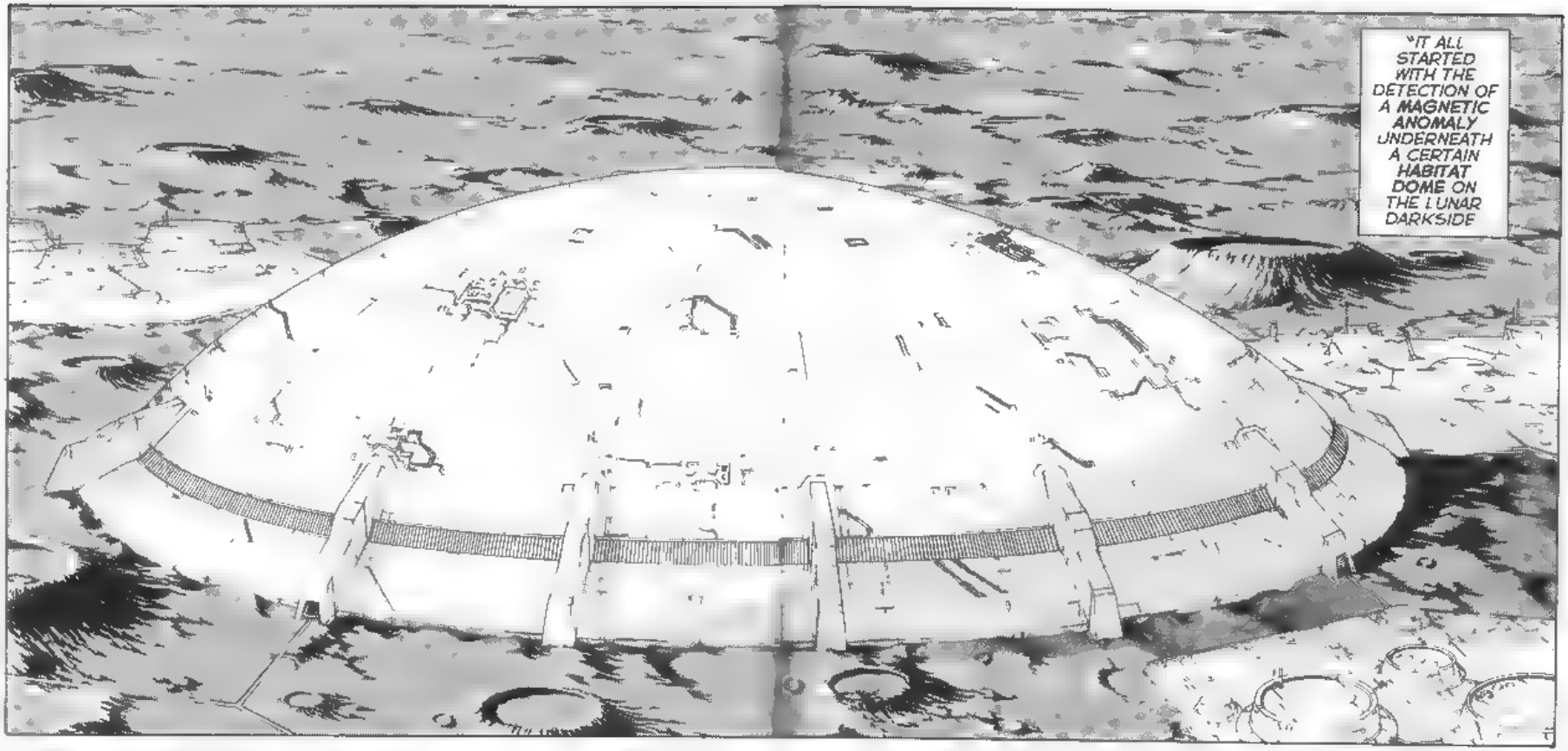
AH, SUNAO ...?
YOU... YOU MAY NOT WANT TO FIND OUT THE TRUTH ABOUT KEI.

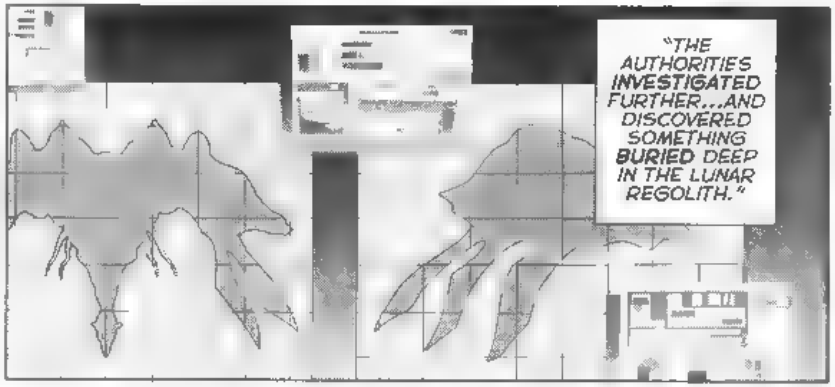
I DON'T THINK YOU'LL LIKE WHAT I TELL YOU... IN FACT, YOU MAY WISH THAT YOU'D NEVER ASKED.
IS THAT ST.LL OKAY WITH YOU...?

I THINK THAT I'LL BE SORRY NO MATTER WHAT I DO...!
BUT... LIKE I SAID BE-FORE...

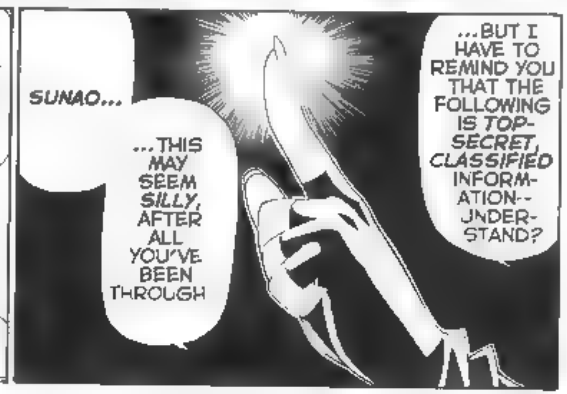
...I JUST WANT TO KNOW THE TRUTH, MISS M-ZAK.

WELL, THEN.
EVEN I DON'T KNOW THE WHOLE STORY...BUT ■RE'S WHAT I DO KNOW...


"IT ALL STARTED WITH THE DETECTION OF A MAGNETIC ANOMALY UNDERNEATH A CERTAIN HABITAT DOME ON THE LUNAR DARKSIDE


"THE AUTHORITIES INVESTIGATED FURTHER...AND DISCOVERED SOMETHING BURIED DEEP IN THE LUNAR REGOLITH."

SO... WHAT WAS IT?


SUNAO...
...THIS MAY SEEM SILLY, AFTER ALL YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH
...BUT I HAVE TO REMIND YOU THAT THE FOLLOWING IS TOP-SECRET, CLASSIFIED INFORM-ATION--UNDER-STAND?

"THEY FOUND AN ALIEN... OBJECT... THAT THEY HYPOTHESIZED TO BE A SPACE-SHIP."
AN ALIEN SPACE-SHIP ...? REALLY ...?
WELL, PERHAPS. THE THING YOU SEE WAS SO FAR BEYOND THE LIMITS OF HUMAN SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING THAT THE INVESTIGATORS COULD ONLY HAZARD A GUESS ABOUT ITS TRUE NATURE.
IT WAS GIVEN THE CODE NAME "STAR-SHIP."

"STAR-SHIP...
MMM
"WHATEVER IT REALLY WAS, THE 'STARSHIP' CLEARLY HAD CRASHED. ITS HULL WAS SO BADLY DAMAGED THAT A SURVEY TEAM HAD LITTLE DIFFICULTY GETTING INSIDE IT.
"THERE, THEY RECOVERED THREE MYSTERIOUS OBJECTS THAT WOULD LATER BE DUBBED "EMBLEM SEEDS."
"IMMEDIATELY THEREAFTER, THEY FOUND THE SENTINELS.
"OR, TO BE MORE ACCURATE, THE SENTINELS FOUND THEM."
!

I DON'T KNOW THE PRECISE DETAILS OF WHAT HAPPENED NEXT, BUT...
WELL.
YOU'VE SEEN THE SENTINELS IN ACTION, OF COURSE. THEY TRIED TO RECLAIM THE EMBLEM SEEDS, AND THEN...AN EXPLOSION CONSUMED THE ENTIRE DOME.
AND THERE... IN THAT CATA-CLYSM...

...THAT'S WHEN, WELL....
...THAT'S WHEN KEI DIED.

OR SHOULD HAVE DIED, ANYWAY.
BUT SOMEHOW, OUR LITTLE KEI...

"...EVEN THOUGH SHE WAS CAUGHT UP IN A BLAST STRONG ENOUGH TO DESTROY A HABITAT DOME THAT WAS BUILT TO WITHSTAND A DIRECT METEORITE IMPACT...
"...EVEN THOUGH HER BODY SHOULD HAVE BEEN REDUCED TO ITS CONSTITUENT MOLECULES..."

"...SHE WAS *FOUND* WITHIN THE DOME'S RUINS AFTER THE BLAST. *ALIVE AND INTACT.*

"THERE, IN *HARD VACUUM*, AT A BRISK *230 DEGREES BELOW ZERO...*"

...THERE, THEY DISCOVERED *THIS* VERSION OF KEI, ENVELOPED IN THE GLOW OF AN *EMBLEM SEED*... AND APPEARING TO BE *YEARS YOUNGER* THAN BEFORE THE EXPLOSION.

YOU...YOU MEAN SHE *ISN'T* THE ORIGINAL KEI...?!

BUT...SHE REMEMBERED ME *PERFECTLY!* SHE--

I CAN'T EXPLAIN *HOW* OR *WHY* THIS HAPPENED, SUNAO. BUT BELIEVE ME, IT *DID*.

WELL, THAT'LL HAVE TO BE ENOUGH *SHOCKING REVELATION* FOR TODAY, I'M AFRAID. WE HAVE TO GET *MOVING*, NOW, BEFORE ANY *MORE BLACK HATS* CATCH UP TO US.

HUH...? OH, RIGHT... *OF COURSE*, MISS M-ZAK.

NOT *THAT* HEAVY, IS SHE? AND BESIDES, DON'T TRY TO TELL ME THAT HAVING HER *PRESSED UP AGAINST YOU* DOESN'T FEEL *NICE...!*

JEEN!

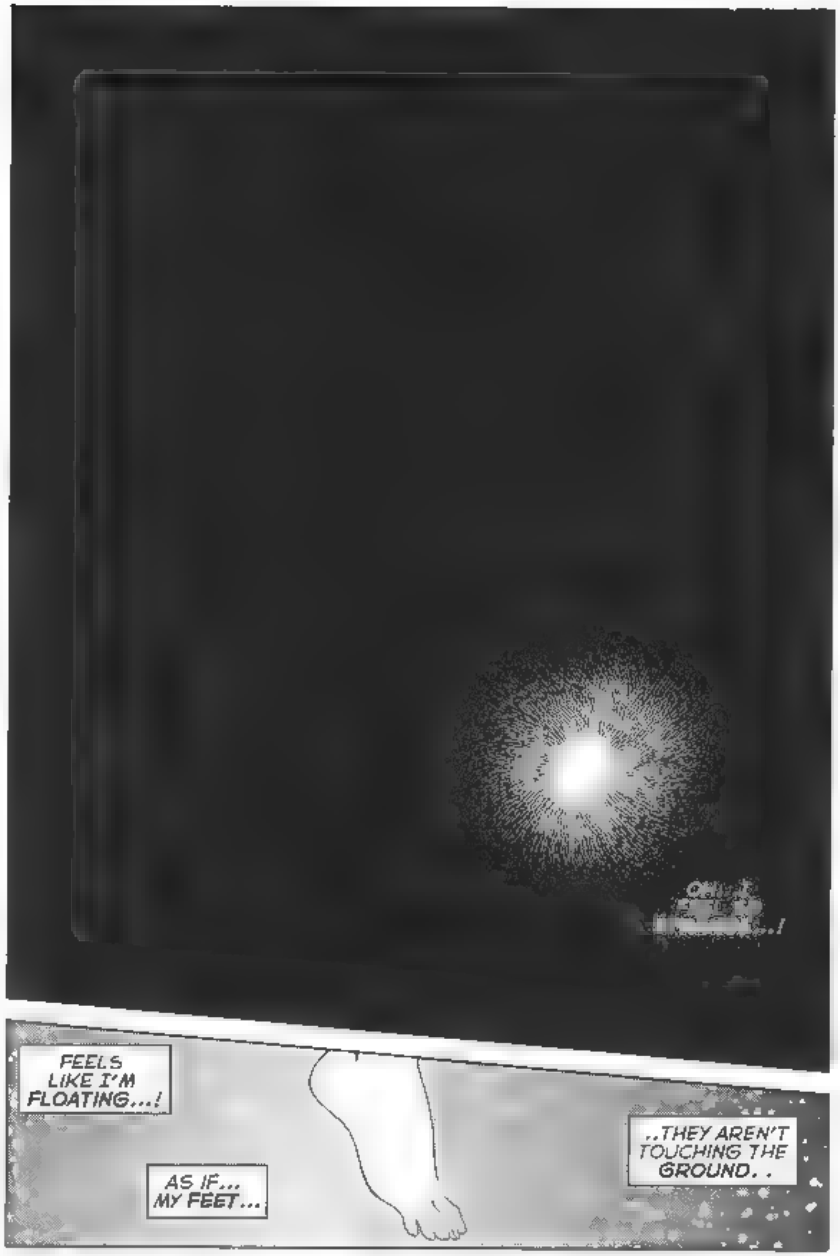
WH-WH-WHAT ARE YOU *SUGGESTING ...?*

YES... *WHAT ARE YOU SUGGESTING, MISS M-ZAK...?*

DO YOU MEAN THAT THIS KEI ISN'T THE REAL KEI...?

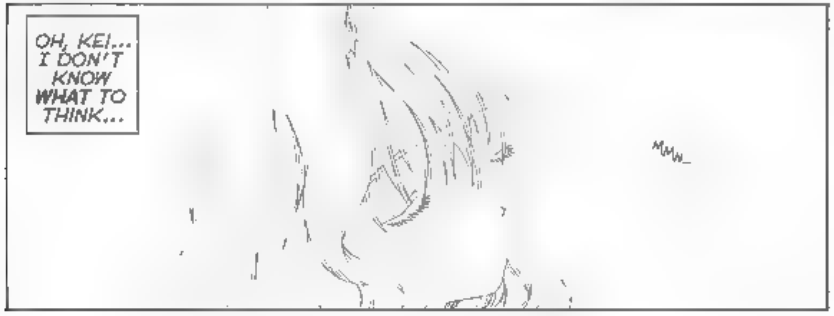
BUT THEN...WHO IS SHE...? OR...WHAT IS SHE...?

SUNAO. YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH THE BASICS OF GENETIC THEORY, CORRECT?
AH, WELL, MORE OR LESS, MA'AM. CHROMO-SOMES, DNA, THE OLD HUMAN GENOME PROJECT AND ALL THAT, RIGHT?
UM... WHY DO YOU ASK, MISS M-ZAK ...?
AFTER SHE WAS RECOVERED FROM THE DOME'S RUINS, A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS WAS RUN ON KEI'S DNA AND CROSSCHECKED AGAINST ALL KNOWN DATA ON HUMAN GENETIC VARIATION.
KEI'S GENETIC SEQUENCE, WELL... IT VERY CLEARLY ISN'T HUMAN.


FEELS LIKE I'M FLOATING...!
AS IF... MY FEET...
..THEY AREN'T TOUCHING THE GROUND..

OOF
WHOA--!
NOT HUMAN...? BUT...THAT CAN'T BE RIGHT...!
WHEWW
SHE FEELS SO WARM... SO SOFT... JUST LIKE ANY OTHER HUMAN...!
I...I CAN FEEL HER HEARTBEAT...
SHE'S ALIVE...
...SHE'S HUMAN...ISN'T SHE...?

THAT WAS KEI'S SMILE...
...THOSE WERE KEI'S MOODS...

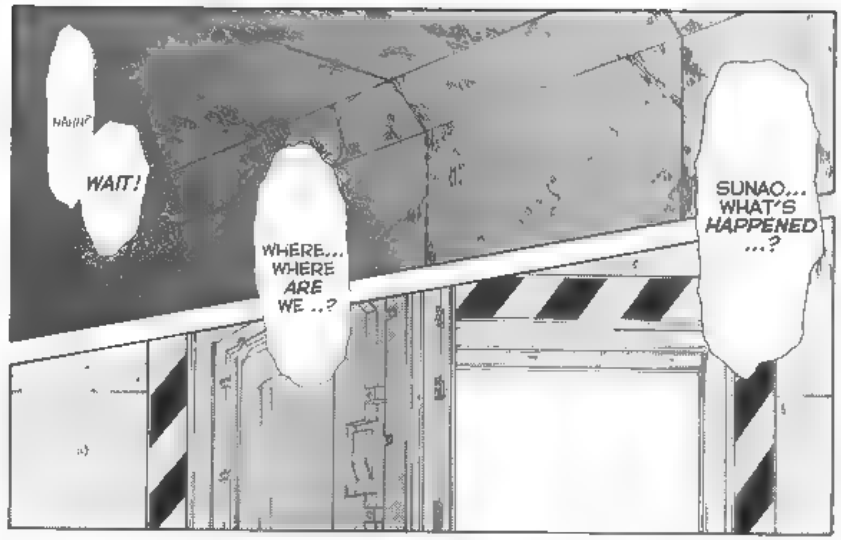


ACT 46

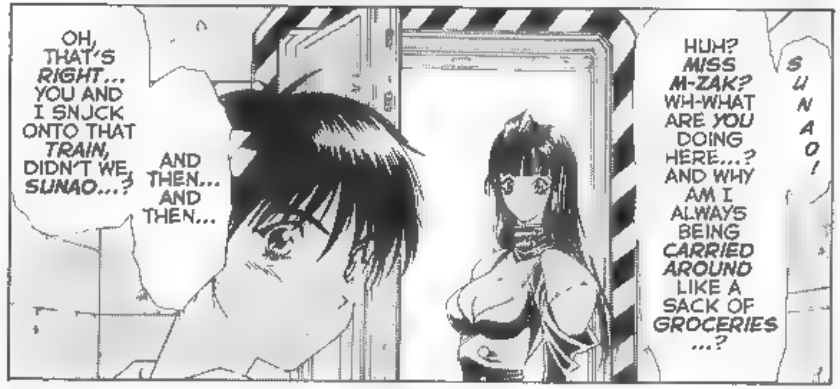
KCHUNGG
VRRMBB
VRRMBB

WAIT HERE, SUNAO. I'LL CALL FOR A TAXI ON THE TUNNEL'S EMERGENCY PHONE AND--
!
HUH?
KEI...! YOU'RE AWAKE ...?
SNIFF
HAHH

KLONKK
WHAAAT?
FSS SHH
OUCH!E...!
WE'VE DONE THAT BEFORE, HAVEN'T WE...?
HA HA


HAH?
WAIT!
WHERE... WHERE ARE WE ..?
SUNAO... WHAT'S HAPPENED ...?

I DON'T RECOGNIZE THIS PLACE AT ALL...!
WHERE DID WE GO... A-AND HOW DID WE GET HERE ...?
I CAN'T REMEMBER ANY-THING... WHY IS THAT...?


OH, THAT'S RIGHT... YOU AND I SNUCK ONTO THAT TRAIN, DIDN'T WE, SUNAO...?
AND THEN... AND THEN...
HUH? MISS M-ZAK? WH-WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE...? AND WHY AM I ALWAYS BEING CARRIED AROUND LIKE A SACK OF GROCERIES ...?
SUNAO!

PLEASE... PUT ME DOWN, OKAY?
SWAP
SWAP
AH...!
EEP!
FMPP
FMPP
FMPP
FMPP
FMPP
SHMPP
SHMPP
SHMPP
GYEEEK!...!
OOPSIE, AGAIN... M-MY LEGS ARE ALL WEAK AND MOOSHY...!
WELL, OF COURSE THEY ARE, KEI... YOU'VE BEEN ASLEEP FOR TWO DAYS STRAIGHT, AFTER ALL...!
WHA-AAT?

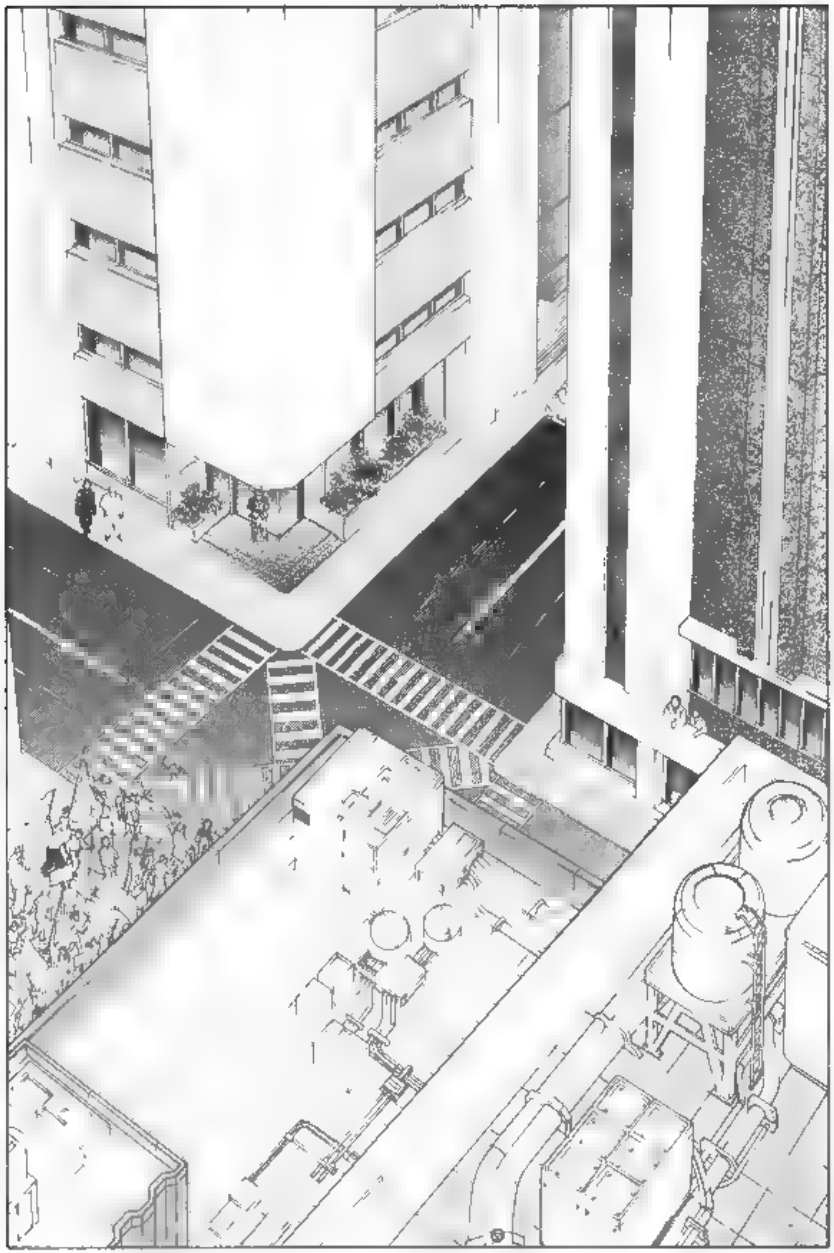
UM, KEI... SO YOU DON'T YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING FROM BEFORE YOU BLACKED OUT, THEN...?
I...I BLACKED OUT...? REALLY ...?
MISS M-ZAK... WHAT'S HAPPEN-ING? WHY DOESN'T SHE--
HMM.
THIS MIGHT BE MEMORY LOSS INDUCED BY POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER, PERHAPS...
REALLY? IS THAT POSSI-BLE...?

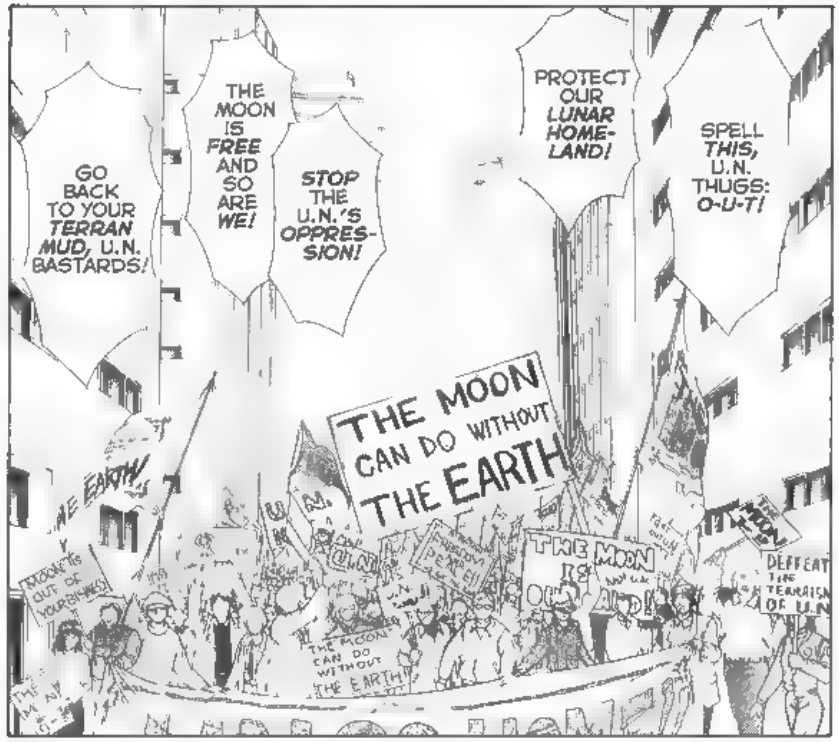
IT'S A RARE PHENOMENON, BUT IT CAN HAPPEN... GIVEN A STRONG ENOUGH LEVEL OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS, THE MEMORY OF A TRAUMATIC EVENT CAN BE SUPPRESSED OR OBLITERATED...
THAT'D BE TRIGGERED BY SHOCK OR FEAR, RIGHT? WELL, SHE'S EXPERIENCED PLENTY OF THAT, HASN'T SHE...?
EEEK!
FWSH
GYAAAA!
WH-WHY AM I WEARING THIS NIGHTGOWN THINGIE? A-AND... WHERE ARE MY UNDIES...?!
AND WHY ARE THE LIGHTS OFF IN THIS AWFUL PLACE? DID... DID YOU BRING ME HERE TO DO SOMETHING DIRTY, SUNAO? DID YOU?

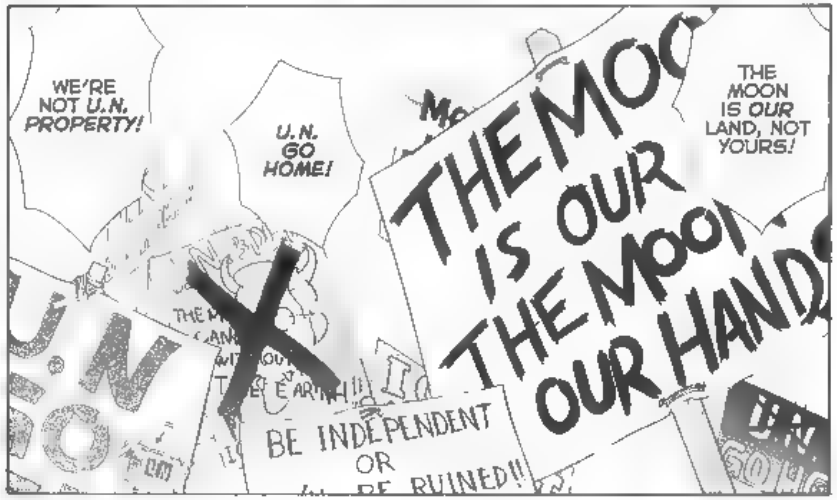
HAHH ...?
OH, YES... IT WAS ALL SO VERY SHOCKING... I COULD HARDLY BELIEVE THAT LITTLE SUNAO COULD BE SUCH AN ANIMAL...!
HUH? TH-TH-THIS IS NO TIME FOR A JOKE, MISS M-ZAK!
SU-NA-O!!
YOU... YOU PERVERT ...!
WHSHH
GURGGLEE

AH HA HA HA HA!
WE'D BEST HURRY AND GET SOME FOOD IN THAT EMPTY BELLY OF YOURS, KEI.
WE CAN TORMENT POOR SUNAO LATER, ALL RIGHT?
OH. SO, SHE REALLY WAS JUST KIDDING ABOUT SUNAO. THEN...? OOPSIE.. AGAIN...!
UH... MISS M-ZAK ...?
YES ...?
I STILL DON'T REALLY UNDER-STAND ALL THAT'S HAPPENED, BUT...

...THIS KEI... SHE IS THE KEI I KNEW. SHE REALLY IS.
IS SHE ..?
YOU'RE RIGHT, SUNAO. NO MATTER HOW SHE CAME TO BE, THIS VERSION OF KEI... SHE'S STILL "OUR" KEI..

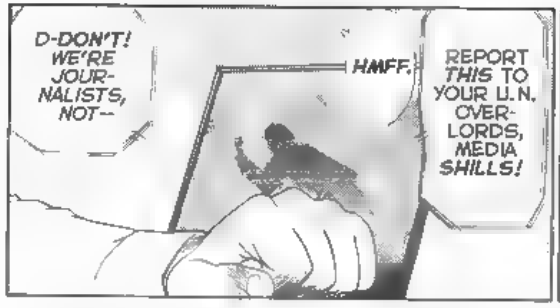



GO BACK TO YOUR TERRAN MUD, U.N. BASTARDS!
THE MOON IS FREE AND SO ARE WE!
STOP THE U.N.'S OPPRES-SION!
PROTECT OUR LUNAR HOME-LAND!
SPELL THIS, U.N. THUGS: O-U-T!
THE MOON CAN DO WITHOUT THE EARTH
DEFEAT THE TERRAIN OF U.N

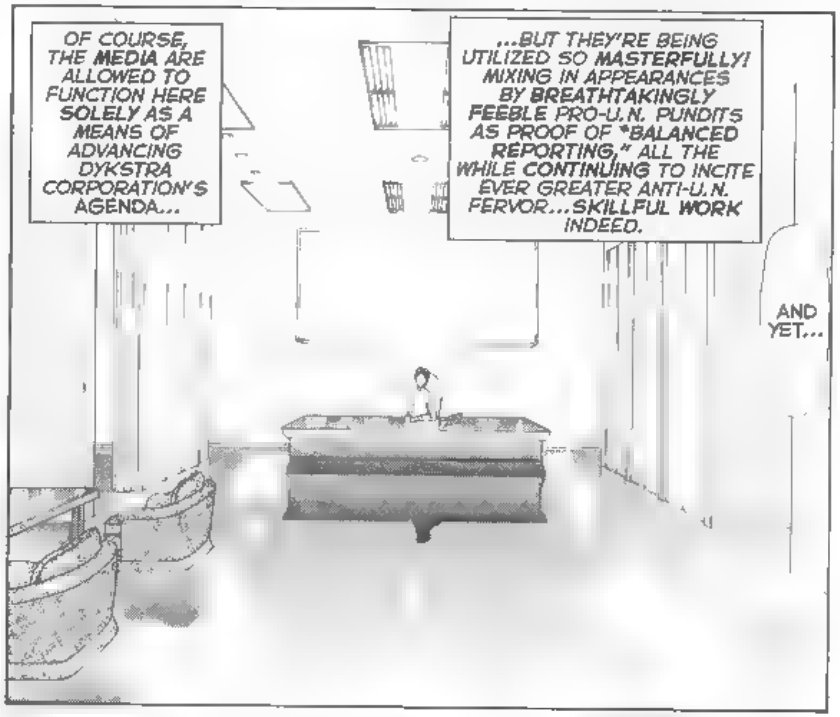

WE'RE NOT U.N. PROPERTY!
U.N. GO HOME!
THE MOON IS OUR LAND, NOT YOURS!
BE INDEPENDENT OR
U.N.

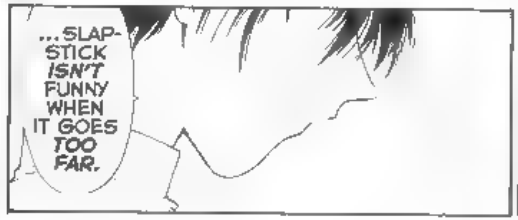
TWO DAYS HAVE PASSED SINCE THE LUNAR REBELS FIRST SEIZED THE U.N.'S LUNAR HEADQUARTERS BUILDING...
...AND PROTESTERS ARE STILL TAKING TO THE STREETS IN ALL THE MOON'S HABITAT DOMES!
AND, AS YOU CAN SEE, THEIR FURY CONTINUES TO--

SPLAPP
GET YOUR SORRY ASSES OUTTA HERE, TERRAN SCUM!
NO! STOP! DON'T DO THIS!
WE'RE NOT WITH THE U.N.! WE'RE JUST--
AAA!
SPLUPP
ECK!


D-DON'T! WE'RE JOURNALISTS, NOT--
HMFF.
REPORT THIS TO YOUR U.N. OVERLORDS, MEDIA SHILLS!

MUST THE MASSES ALWAYS BE SO LAUGHABLY VULNERABLE TO MEDIA MANIPULATION...?
TOKK
TOKK


OF COURSE, THE MEDIA ARE ALLOWED TO FUNCTION HERE SOLELY AS A MEANS OF ADVANCING DYKSTRA CORPORATION'S AGENDA...
...BUT THEY'RE BEING UTILIZED SO MASTERFULLY! MIXING IN APPEARANCES BY BREATHTAKINGLY FEEBLE PRO-U.N. PUNDITS AS PROOF OF "BALANCED REPORTING," ALL THE WHILE CONTINUING TO INCITE EVER GREATER ANTI-U.N. FERVOR...SKILLFUL WORK INDEED.
AND YET...


...SLAPSTICK ISN'T FUNNY WHEN IT GOES TOO FAR.

HMM?
DON'T YOU WANT YOUR SIDE OF THE STORY TO--
UNGHHH
BREEP BREEP

AH, DIRECTOR HEIDEMANN...? WE'VE RECEIVED A VISITOR FROM DYKS[redacted] CORPORATION HEADQUARTERS...!
A VISITOR, FAWN?
YES, SIR... BUT HE'S NOT...
KCHAK

!
SO. YOU'RE THAT BIG-SHOT HEIDEMANN WHO'S GOT EVERYBODY RUNNING SCARED, AREN'T YOU?

WELL, GOOD THING I DON'T SCARE QUITE SO EASY, HUH? NAME'S ANTHONY HAIDRO-BUTTE.
DYKSTRA CORPORATE SECURITY, AT YOUR SERVICE... MORE OR LESS.

Act 47

WEL-
COME.
KTAK

I AM INDEED APEP HEIDEMANN, DIRECTOR OF THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PROJECT.
WELL, HERE'S THE DATA YOU REQUESTED FROM DYKSTRA SECURITY... APEP.
FWIPP

COME AND GET IT.

SO YOUNG...
AH. THANK YOU SO MUCH, ANTHONY.

...BUT IF DYKSTRA SECURITY SENT HIM, HE MUST BE A FORMIDABLE OPERATIVE.
AGKK!
FWSHH

SO WHAT'S THIS ABOUT, HMM...? AS FAR AS I CAN RECALL, DIRECT ATTACKS ON MY PERSON WEREN'T PART OF MY AGREEMENT WITH YOUR COMPANY'S CHAIRMAN...
AH, I SEE NOW. THE TERRIBLY DISGRUNTLED HEAD OF DYKSTRA SECURITY, MR. VOGEL... I TAKE IT THAT HE ASSIGNED YOU TO KILL ME...?

YOU'RE AS CLUELESS AS THE REST OF THEM.
VOGEL...? AS IF I'D TAKE ORDERS FROM THAT HALFWITTED SCUMBAG...
WELL, IN THAT CASE...
IT'S BARELY PERCEPTIBLE, BUT I JUST FELT SOME SORT OF TELEPATHIC PULSE...AND HE'S INSERTED SOMETHING THROUGH THE WOUND IN MY HAND...!
IT'S NOT A NEEDLE... HE HASN'T DRUGGED ME...BUT THEN WHY THIS SUDDEN NUMBNESS...?
...WHO SENT YOU HERE?
PLEASE PARDON ME, SIR...
ICHAK

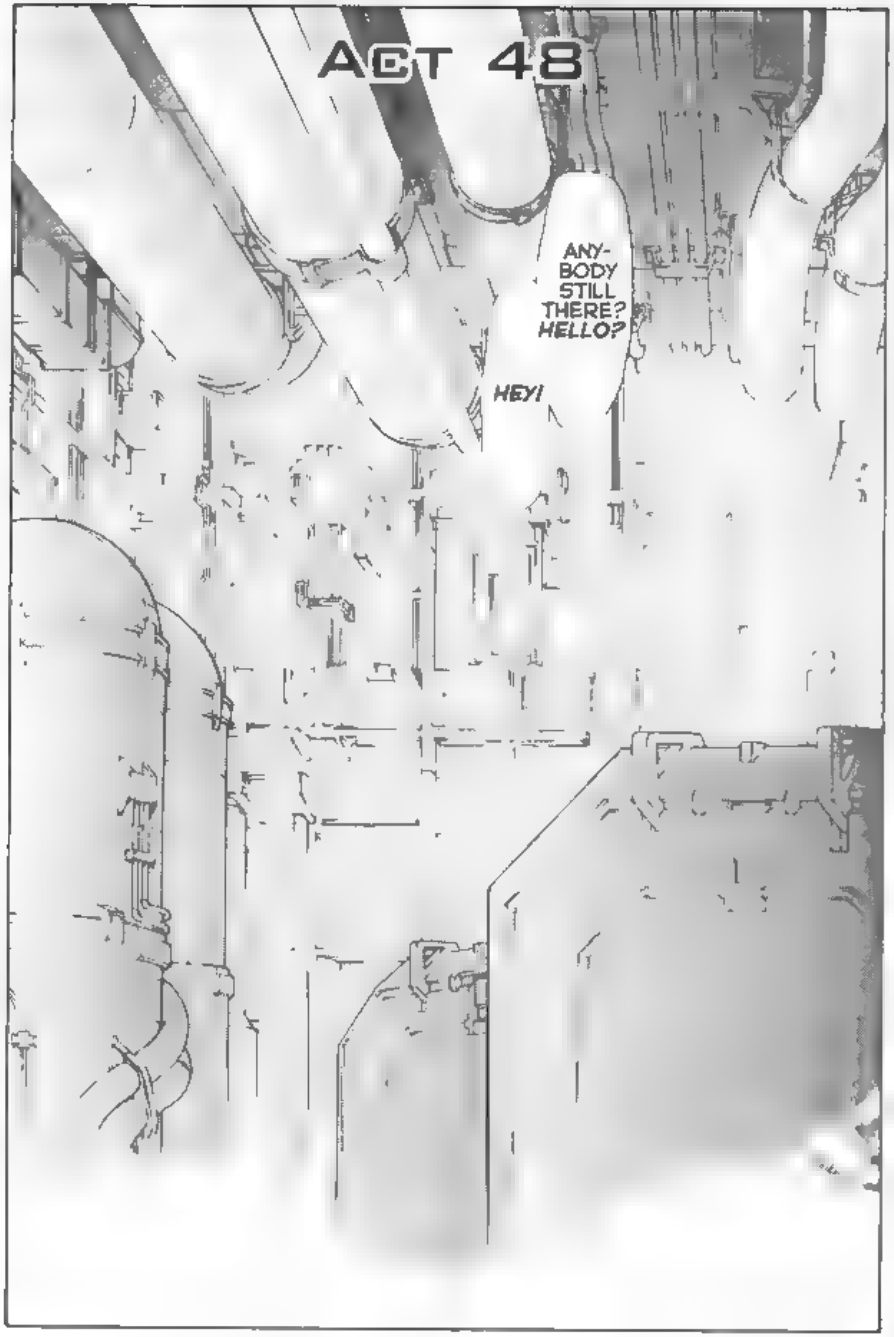
FAWN!!
GET OUT OF HERE, NOW!
EH?
SHINGG

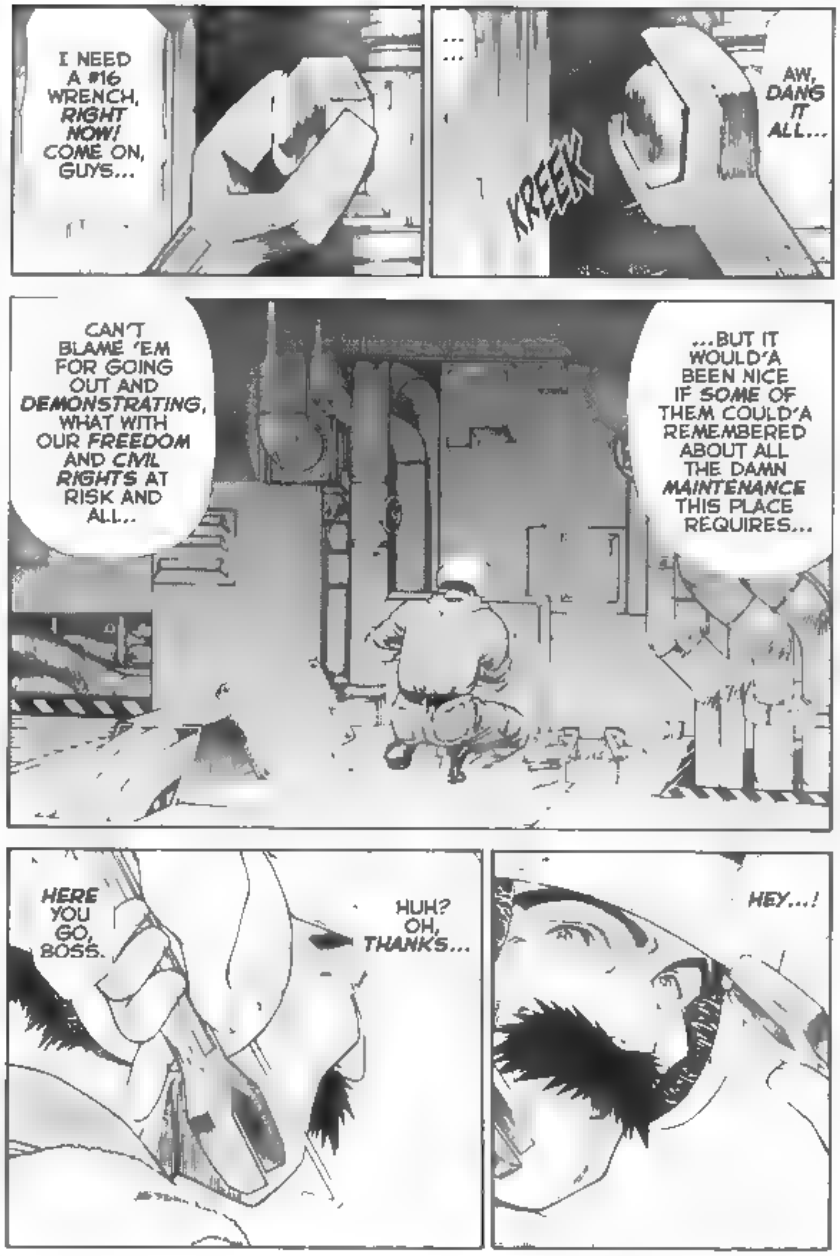
HMM. INTERESTING.
YOU INDUCE NEUROLOGICAL CONTROL OF YOUR TARGET VIA AN EXTRUDED MOLECULAR WIRE, RATHER LIKE DRASTICALLY EXTENDED NEURAL FIBER.
IN EFFECT, YOU'RE A TACTILE TELEPATH.
YOU CATCH ON FAST, SMART GUY. MY LINES PLUG RIGHT INTO THE VICTIMS' NERVOUS SYSTEMS...AND GIVE ME TOTAL CONTROL OF THE POOR BASTARDS' BODIES AND BRAINS.
I CAN MAKE ANYONE INTO MY HELPLESS LITTLE PUPPET, LIKE YOUR WOMAN HERE... OR YOU, FOR THAT MATTER.
REALLY ...?
PARDON, BUT I DON'T BELIEVE THAT YOUR POWERS CAN ACTUALLY BE QUITE SO POTENT...!
WHAT?!
AFTER ALL...
...IF YOU WERE INDEED AS POWERFUL AS YOU CLAIM, YOU WOULDN'T BE TRAPPED IN THE MERELY SUBORDINATE ROLE OF HIRED THUG, WOULD YOU?

SHUT THE HELL UP!
WHSHH
KCHINK
YOU DON'T TALK TO ME LIKE THAT, UNDERSTAND? OR...
FWIPP
...THINGS GET ALL BLOODY. GET THE IDEA, NOW?
FWMPP
YOU'RE JUST LIKE THE REST OF MY TARGETS, YOU KNOW. EACH OF YOU HAS A VULNERABLE POINT.
AND THIS TASTY PIECE OF ASS IS YOUR ACHILLES HEEL, I FIGURE.
SHIPP

NOW... LISTEN UP.
DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT MOVING, OR PUTTING UP A FIGHT, OR YOUR SEX TOY GETS--
SHLIPP
ENOUGH. HOW ABOUT A TRADE, ANTHONY? I WON'T MOVE, OR PUT UP A FIGHT...IF YOU'LL ANSWER TWO QUESTIONS FOR ME.
WHY ARE YOU CARRYING OUT THIS SORT OF SORDID WETWORK...? WHAT ARE YOU HOPING TO ACHIEVE IN THE LONG RUN BY DOING THE CORPORATION'S DIRTY LAUNDRY ...?

I'M DOING THIS JUST... JUST SO THAT I CAN FIND A PLACE FOR MYSELF, OKAY ...?
NOT THAT YOU'D UNDER-STAND...
"A PLACE FOR MYSELF" ...?
OH, BUT I DO UNDER-STAND, ANTHONY.
WHY THE HELL IS HE SMILING...?
WELL, YOU CAN DIE HAPPY, THEN!


ACT 48
ANY-BODY STILL THERE? HELLO?
HEY!


I NEED A #16 WRENCH, RIGHT NOW! COME ON, GUYS...
...
KREEK
AW, DANG IT ALL...
CAN'T BLAME 'EM FOR GOING OUT AND DEMONSTRATING, WHAT WITH OUR FREEDOM AND CIVIL RIGHTS AT RISK AND ALL...
...BUT IT WOULD'A BEEN NICE IF SOME OF THEM COULD'A REMEMBERED ABOUT ALL THE DAMN MAINTENANCE THIS PLACE REQUIRES...
HERE YOU GO, BOSS.
HUH? OH, THANKS...
HEY...!

SUNAO! WHERE'VE YOU *BEEN*, KID? SEEMS LIKE I AIN'T SEEN YOU FOR A *DOG'S AGE!*
OH, UH... I'VE BEEN, Y'KNOW, *HERE* AND *THERE...!*
BUT WHAT ABOUT *YOU*, BOSS? WHERE *IS* EVERY-ONE ELSE?
WHO, *THEM?* THE WHOLE DAMN LOT OF FIRST AND SECOND SHIFT RAN OFF TO THE *PROTEST MARCHES...*
UH...SO YOU'RE HERE *ALL ALONE*, BOSS? WHY DIDN'T *YOU* GO TO THE DEMON-STRATIONS, TOO...?
ARE YOU *KIDDING* ME, SUNAO? IT'S *MY JOB* TO KEEP THIS HABITAT RUNNING, AIN'T IT?

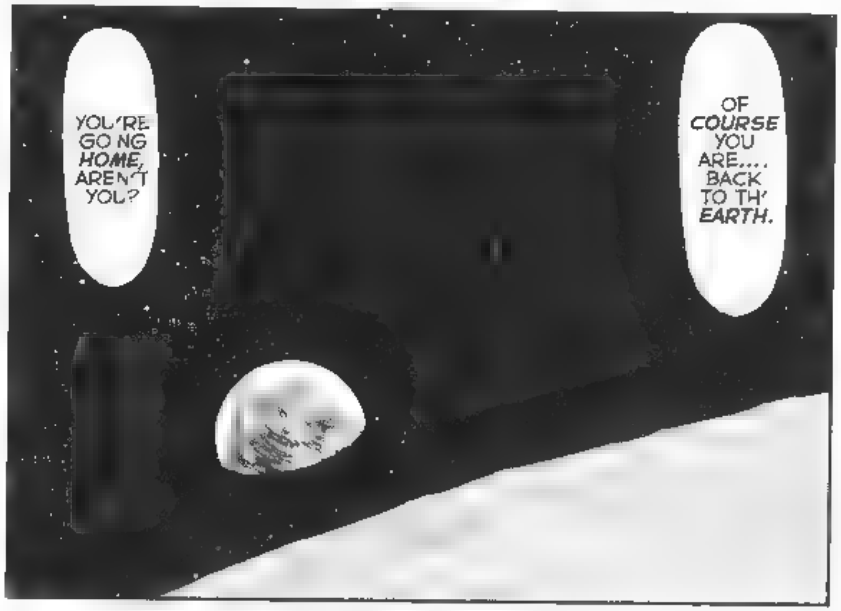
WHAT WE DO HERE PROTECTS *EVERYONE* ON THE MOON.
KCHIK
YOU *FOLLOW* ME, KID?
FLIPP
JUST FORGET TO TIGHTEN UP *ONE BOLT*, Y'KNOW, AND WE COULD ALL END UP *DEAD* IN A FLASH.
ALL THAT STANDS BETWEEN US AND THE *LUNAR VACUUM* ARE FRAGILE LITTLE WALLS THAT ANYONE, *ANYTHING* COULD BREACH.

SO, I'M PROUD OF MY WORK HERE...I REALLY AM.
ESPECIALLY HERE AT THE SPACEPORT, WHERE THE EARTH AND THE MOON, Y'KNOW, COME TOGETHER...

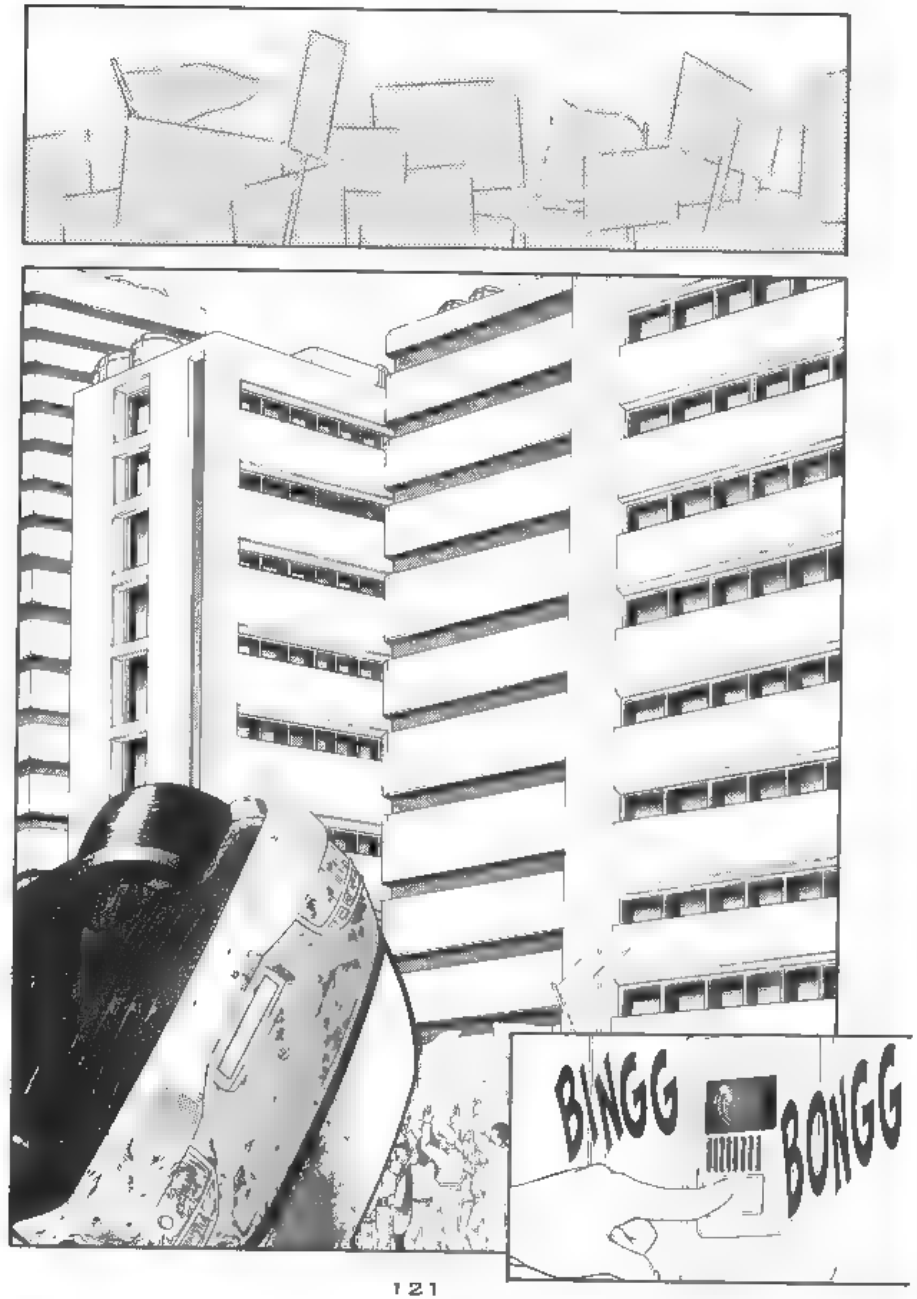
THIS PLACE IS WHAT LIVING ON THE MOON'S ALL ABOUT, KID. Y'KNOW, COEXISTENCE, COOPERATION, WORKIN' TOGETHER AND ALL THAT.
LIVING ON THE MOON...

SO, TALK TO ME, KID. WHAT'S WITH THOSE FANCY CLOTHES OF YOURS?
YOU TAKIN' A TRIP? TO WHERE ...?
HEH HEH HEH

...OH.


YOU'RE GO NG HOME, AREN'T YOU?
OF COURSE YOU ARE.... BACK TO TH' EARTH.

DAMN...I THOUGHT YOU WOULDN'T BE LEAVING FOR *YEARS* YET.
SUFF'S
HEY, K.D... DON'T *DO* THAT.
CAN'T *STAND* TEARS, Y'KNOW.
G-GOODBYE...
GOODBYE, BOSS...


BINGG
BONGG

UM, HELLO? IT'S ME, SUNAO...
MY, THAT WAS QUICK... COME ON IN, SWEETUMS.
HAHH? IS THAT ALL YOU'RE TAKING? A SEASONED TRAVELER, CLEARLY...
AH, NO, NOT REALLY, MISS M-ZAK... IT'S JUST THAT I DON'T OWN MUCH OF ANYTHING ...!
FINE, SUNAO. AT LEAST YOU GOT BACK HERE IN ONE PIECE ...!
IT'S BEDLAM OUT THERE ...!
PEOPLE ARE GETTING THEIR HOMES LEVELED JUST BECAUSE THEY WORK FOR THE U.N..

...
...
IF IT'S KEI YOU'RE LOOKING FOR, SHE'S IN COUNSELING WITH NURSE HISHIKA AT THE MOMENT...!
THIS MAY REPRESENT SOME KIND OF ELABORATE PSYCHOLOGICAL SELF-DEFENSE MECHANISM...BUT APPARENTLY, DESPITE ALL ITS GAPS AND BLANK SPOTS, KE.'S MEMORY REMAINS RATHER MORE COHESIVE THAN ONE MIGHT EXPECT.
WELL, COHESIVE BY KEI STANDARDS, ANYWAY.
SO SHE'S, AH, DELETING ALL THE BAD MEMORIES AND JUST STRINGING TOGETHER WHATEVER'S LEFT? THAT SOUNDS, WELL, FRAGILE TO ME...!
IT MOST CERTAINLY IS, SUNAO. THAT'S WHY SHE NEEDS THERAPY, TO HELP INTEGRATE THESE RECENTLY RECOVERED MEMORIES OF HERS WITHOUT TRIGGERING FURTHER FLASHBACKS...
HUH...? "FLASH-BACKS" ...?

YES. YOU SEE, AN UNPREDICTABLE RANGE OF STIMULI CAN TRIGGER *INTENSELY VIVID* RECOLLECTIONS OF REPRESSED TRAUMAS, CAUSING THE VICTIM TO *RELIVE* THE EVENTS AS IF THEY'RE HAPPENING TO HER *ALL OVER AGAIN.*
HOW *IS* SHE ...?
I *JUST* BROUGHT HER OUT OF A *HYPNOTIC STATE,* SO SHE'S STILL--
HEY, *ATTIM...* HAVE YOU PICKED OUT A RECIPE FOR THAT *CAKE* YOU PROMISED TO BAKE *ME...?* I'M *HUNGRY ...!*
AH--?!
GAKK!

GROANN WHY DID SHE HAVE TO RETAIN *THAT MEMORY* IN PARTICULAR ...?
OH, *SUNAO!* YOU MUST BE A-- EXCITED TO FINALLY BE *GOING HOME,* AREN'T YOU?
UH... IT'S NOT *LIKE* THAT, KEI...!
OH, YES IT *IS* LIKE THAT! AND WE NEED TO *CELEBRATE* THE OCCASION, WITH THE *CAKE* ATTIM'S GOING TO MAKE FOR US!
ISN'T THAT *RIGHT,* ATTIM?
L...*LOOK HERE,* KEI...I'M TRYING TO PLAN OUR *ESCAPE*...AH, I MEAN, *OUR TRIP BACK HOME*...I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR *COOKING...!*
AWWW... NO FAIR...!
UM... AH... WEL... *CHANGE THE SUBJECT RIGHT?*
ER, MISS M-ZAK...I WAS, JH, *WON-DERING...*
...WHERE'S DOCTOR HEIDEMANN?
HELP ME OUT, HERE, SUNAO...!
WINK
WINK

OH! HOW FUNNY YOU SHOULD ASK, SUNAO! THE PROFESSOR IS OFF DISCUSSING IMPORTANT MATTERS WITH OUR U.N. LIAISON! ISN'T THAT FASCINATING...?
EHHP!
OH, YOU MEAN OUR ESCORT BACK TO EARTH? A MISTER REN, I BELIEVE...?
HEY, DOC! WAIT UP, HUH?
KLAK KLAK
BUMMER, AIN'T IT? I KNOW YOU DIDN'T WANT TO GO RUNNING BACK TO OL' TERRA RIGHT NOW, BUT, HEY...

...THE MOON'S A HARSH MISTRESS THESE DAYS, ISN'T SHE...?
GOTTA THINK OF YOUR DAUGHTER'S SAFETY, AFTER ALL...
ENOUGH! I SAID I'D GO, DIDN'T I?
HMFF.
"OUR ESCORT"...? THE TERM "BABYSITTER" MIGHT BE A BIT MORE ACCURATE...
HEH... WELL... SO, UH... THIS REN FELLOW IS COMING ALONG WITH US...?
HEH HEH
I WONDER WHAT HE'S LIKE...?
HE'S LIKE THIS.

HAHH?!
YOU'RE "MISTER REN"...? BUT WE~
AND THE PRIZE IS NONE OTHER THAN YOURS TRULY, THE INCOMPARABLE R-E-N!
GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN!
YES, IN-DEEDY! YOU WIN THE PRIZE, COM-PADRE!

BUT WHY CALL ME "MISTER REN," AMIGO? THAT'S DARN COLD AND FORMA-, GIVEN THE WAY THAT WE CHEATED DEATH TOGETHER THE OTHER DAY...!
SUNAO... YOU CAN JUST CALL ME REN
SHIPP
!
UM... SURE. SO, UH... GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN... REN.
WHAT'S WITH THIS GUY...?
SHIPP
SHIPP
HI HO, HI HO, IT'S OFF TO EARTH WE GO, HUH? GOOD TO BE TRAVELING WITH YOU, MY FRIEND!
SO WE'LL BE IN THE COMPANY OF THE INFAMOUS "REN," EH?
HMM? YOU'VE HEARD OF HIM, MISS M-ZAK?

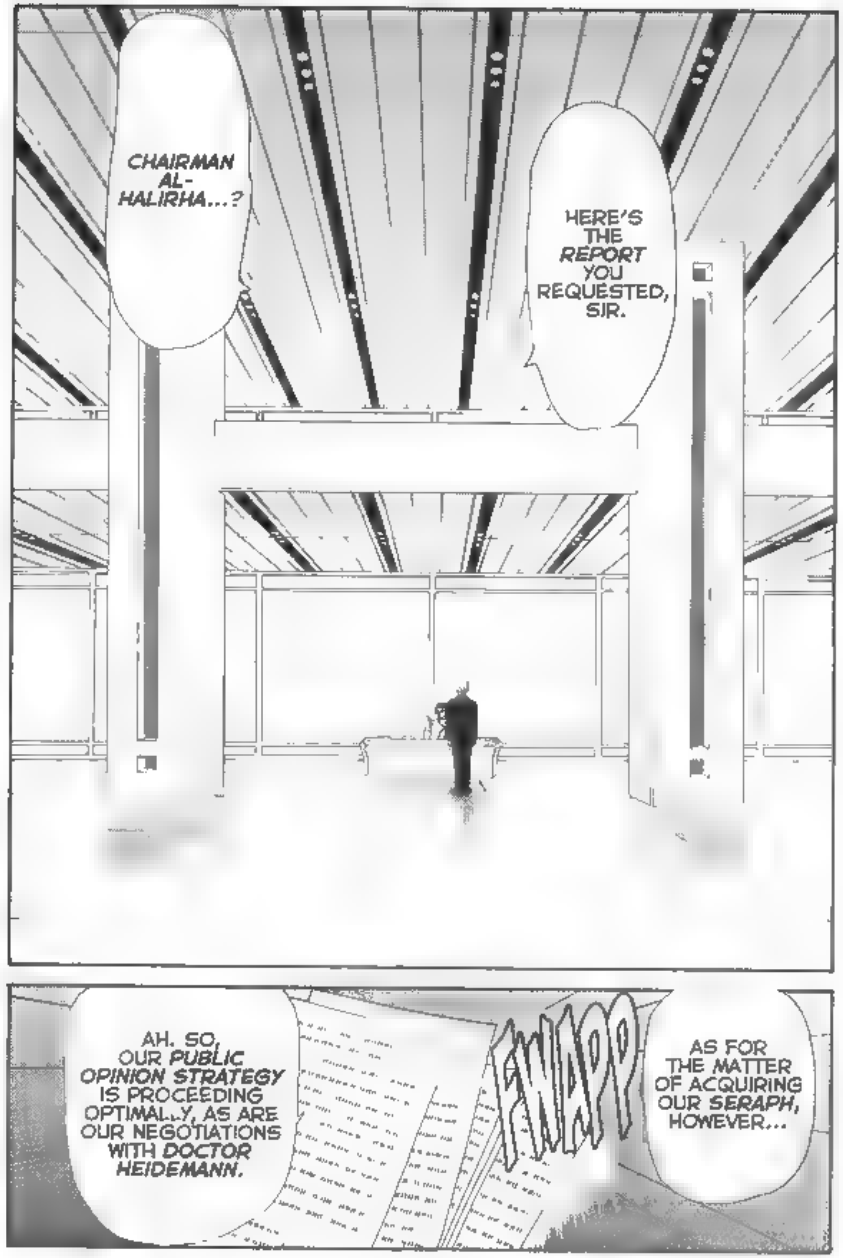
ACTUALLY, WE MET... AND I CHECKED UP ON HIM LATER. THE NAME "REN" IS JUST A COVER, WITHOUT A DOUBT...
...BUT IT SEEMS HE'S QUITE A FAMOUS LAD... THE ONLY ACTIVE U.N. COMBAT OPERATIVE WHO'S NEVER BEEN WOUNDED IN ACTION.
HE'S EITHER UNBELIEVABLY LUCKY...OR UNBELIEVABLY GOOD.
EITHER WAY, HE'S CERTAINLY A REMARKABLE SPECIMEN...
KEI, DEAR... ARE YOU ALL RIGHT ...?
KEI ...?
KEI! OH, NO... DON'T TELL ME SHE'S--
HAS SEEING REN AGAIN TRIGGERED A FLASH-BACK TO THE BATTLE AT THE LAB...?

GAKK
Y-YES, KEI ...?
ATTIM ...!
FWSH
WHAT IS THIS? WHAT IS THIS? DON'T TELL ME SUNAO IS INTO HOT TWO-BOY ACTION?!
THIS IS HORRIBLE! I'M SO DISIL-LUSIONED!
FW HIT

Act 49

B-B-BUT... WE *WEREN'T*... I'M *NOT*...! N-NO *WAY*!
OBVIOUSLY THE CHILD DOESN'T UNDER-STAND GENUINE *MALE BOND-ING*...

THAT'S "MALE BOND-ING"...? I DON'T *THINK* SO!
UH, MISTER REN... COULD YOU PLEASE, UM, *BACK OFF*...?
YEAH! GET YOUR CREEPY HANDS *OFF* OF HIM!
HEY, THIS IS JUST THE *NATURAL CLOSENESS* OF MEN WHO'VE ENDURED THE *FIERY CRUCIBLE OF COMBAT* TOGETHER, Y'SEE...


CHAIRMAN AL-HALIRHA...?
HERE'S THE *REPORT* YOU REQUESTED, SIR.
AH. SO, OUR *PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGY* IS PROCEEDING OPTIMALLY, AS ARE OUR NEGOTIATIONS WITH *DOCTOR HEIDEMANN.*
FWAPP
AS FOR THE MATTER OF ACQUIRING OUR *SERAPH*, HOWEVER...

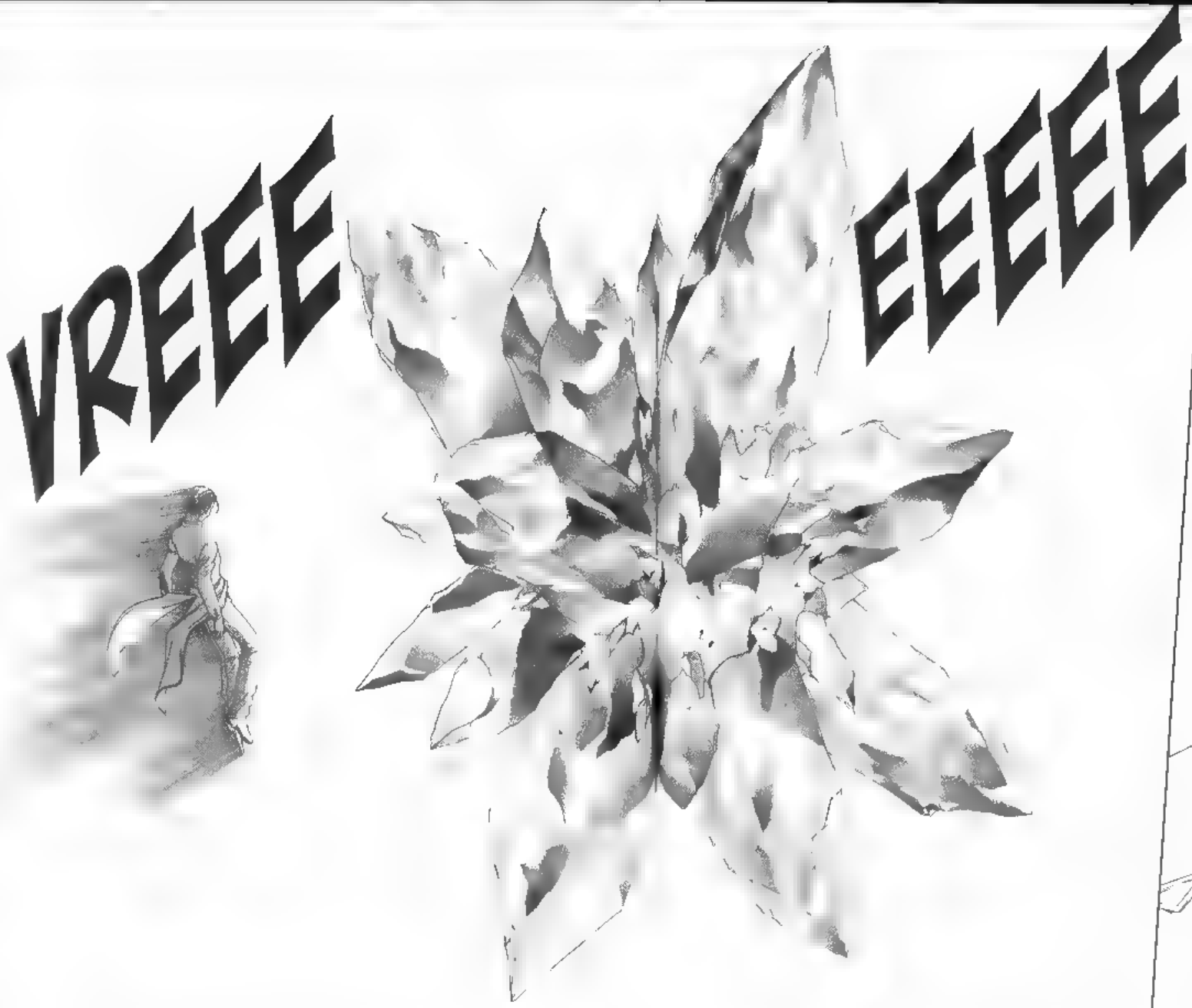
S-SIR...REGARDING THE SERAPH...W-WE'RE PURSUING THAT ISSUE IN TANDEM WITH OUR OVERTURES TO HEIDEMANN! I FEEL THAT WE'VE MADE [redacted] PROG--
CHIKE
GLPPE
KSHHH
HOW CAN I BE OF AS-SISTANCE, SIR?
GRACE US WITH AN UPDATE, WELLER, IF YOU PLEASE.
YES, SIR!

DYKSTRA CORPORATION IS NOW SOLIDLY POSITIONED IN ALL KEY MEDIA, FROM BROADCASTING AND PRINT OUTLETS TO THE NET.
CHIKE
IN TERMS OF LOCAL POLITICS, WE'VE ESTABLISHED CLOSE TIES WITH ALL THE MAJOR DOME CITY COUNCILS.
SO FAR, OUR PROGRAM HAS EN-COUNTERED NO SERIOUS OBSTACLES.
EXCEL-LENT.
THEN INFORM MY [redacted] AND REQUEST THAT HE COMMENCE HIS PRE-PARATIONS SHORTLY.
YES, [redacted] I'LL CONTACT HIM IMMEDI-ATELY.

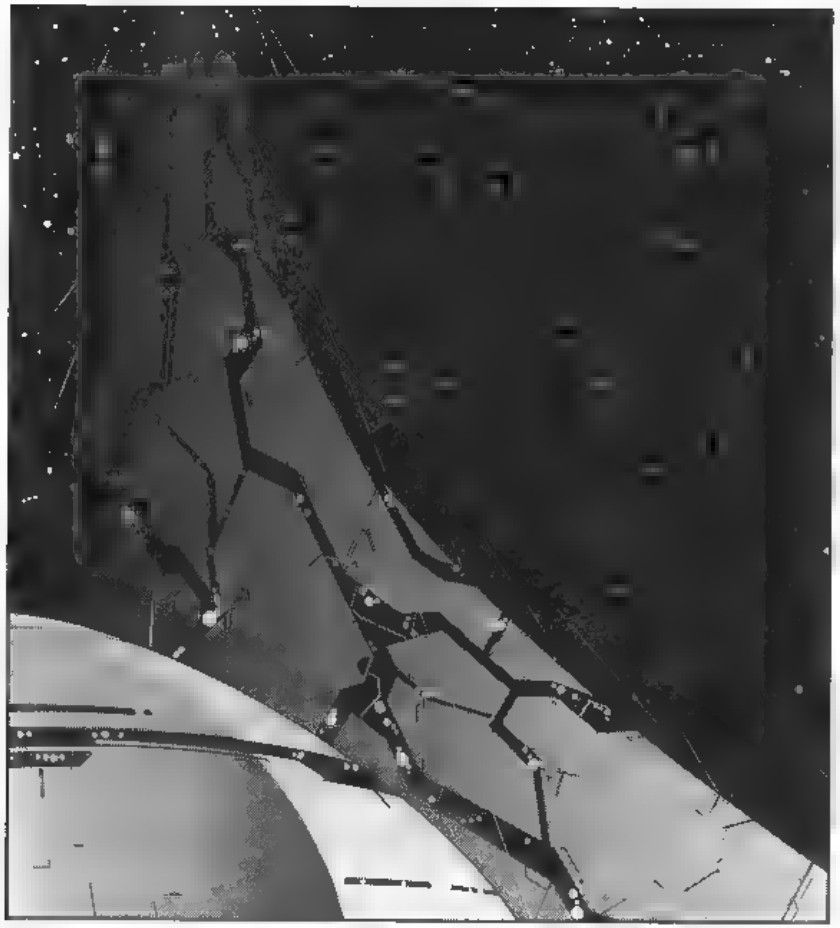
SO. WILL OUR DOCTOR HEIDEMANN BRING HIS SERAPH BACK TO THE EARTH WITH HIM...?
S-SIR?
ALL REPORTS INDICATE THAT HE'S DOING EXACTLY THAT, SIR.
B-BUT... JUST IN CASE... WE'RE IMPLEMENTING A SECONDARY OPERATION THAT SHOULD...
...SHOULD SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVE THE LIKELIHOOD OF--
THAT IS ENOUGH, VOGEL.
CHANGG
YOU MAY GO.

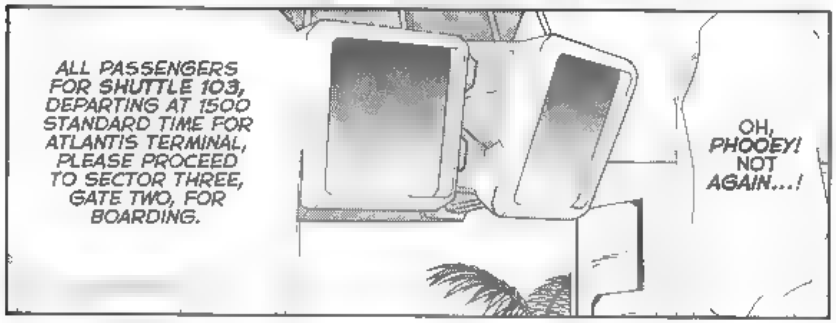
VRRRRMM
KLANGG

FSHHH
FSHOW


VREEE
EEEEE

THE LONG YEARS OF BIDING OUR TIME ARE OVER. AT LAST, OUR FEAST BEGINS...





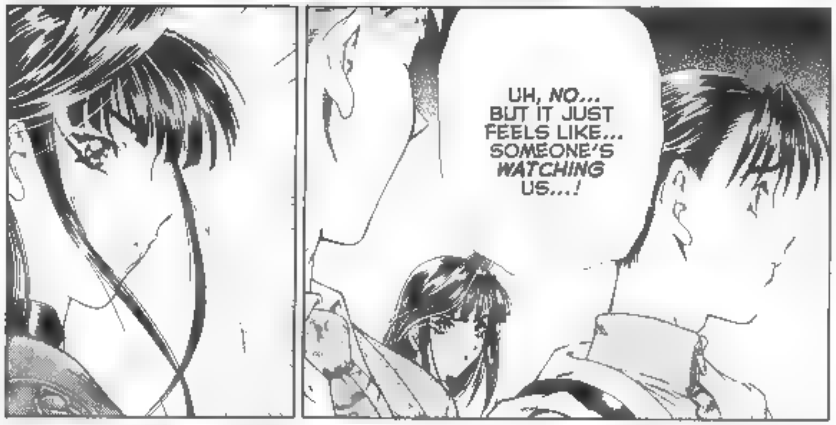
THIS IS SO SILLY ...!
BRRR

NO KIDDING. FIRST THE TICKETING COUNTER'S COMPUTERS, NOW THE SECURITY CHECKPOINT'S SYSTEMS....! I'D UNDERSTAND IF ARMED PEOPLE LIKE YOU AND MISS M-ZAK RAN INTO PROBLEMS, BUT WHY KEI...?
FUNNY, AIN'T IT?
OF COURSE, WE U.N. INVESTIGATOR BADASSES ACTUALLY HAVE FULL CLEARANCE TO CARRY DARN NEAR ANYTHING THROUGH SECURITY, Y'KNOW...

IS THIS KEI'S UN-CONSCIOUSLY PROJECTED EM-FIELD INTERFERENCE PHENOMENON, AS YOU MENTIONED IN YOUR REPORT?
SEEMS THAT WAY...
...ALTHOUGH THIS HASN'T HAPPENED VERY OFTEN SINCE WE TRAVELED TO THE MOON...!
THEN, PERHAPS THE MAGNETIC FIELDS OF THE SPACEPORT'S ACCELERATOR ARE TRIGGERING THE EFFECT?

NOT LIKELY, GIVEN THAT WHEN WE RODE THE ELEVATOR UP FROM THE EARTH, NOTHING LIKE THIS HAPPENED... EH?
?!
WHAT...? WE'RE BEING WATCHED...?
DO YOU THINK THE CAUSE IS LUNAR, THEN? INTERESTING. HAVE ANY OTHER PARANORMAL ABILITIES MANIFESTED DURING HER STAY HERE...?

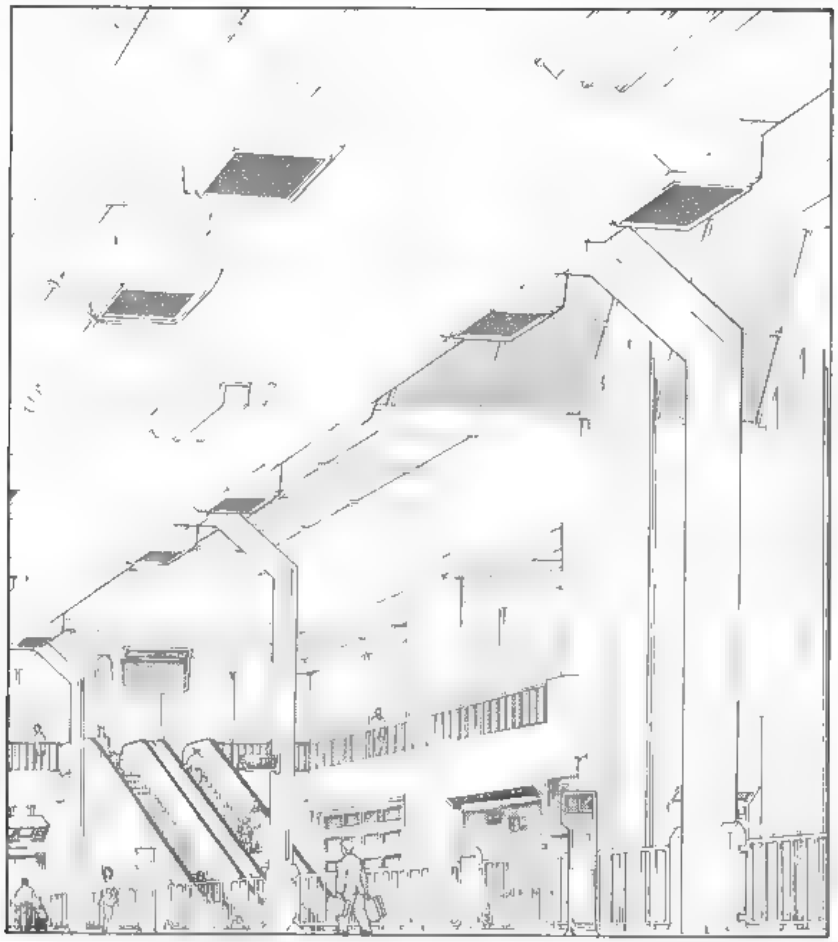
AND SOMEHOW...I CAN SENSE THAT THIS GAZE IS DEFINITELY HOSTILE...!
SEE SOMEONE YOU KNOW OVER THERE, M-ZAK?

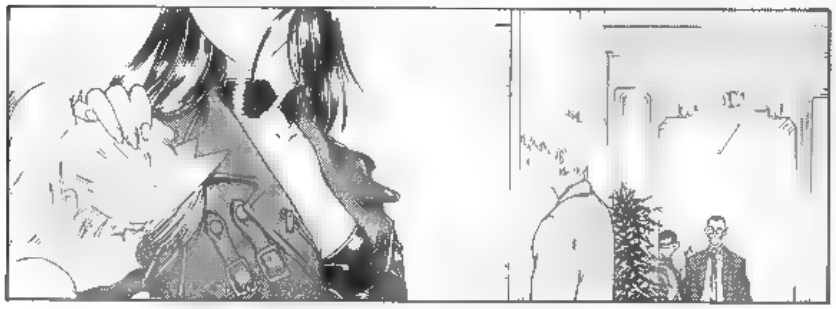

UH, NO... BUT IT JUST FEELS LIKE... SOMEONE'S WATCHING US...!

SUNAO? YOU CAN SENSE IT, TOO...?
HEH.
THAT OL' BURNING GAZE YOU'RE FEELING, SUNAO?
WINK
THAT'S COMING FROM ME--
GYOWWCH!
KRNCH

OH, DEARIE ME, SO SORRY!
GUESS I'M STILL NOT USED TO THIS SILLY LUNAR GRAVITY, AFTER ALL...!
KE! ...!
OH, MY. HOW VERY GIDDY AND WHIMSI-CAL..
THERE'S OUR TARGET, GENTLE-MEN...
...AND NOTE THAT SHE'S BEING ESCORTED BY THE SCARLET ANGEL, NO LESS!

ACT 50





HMMM.
SO THAT'S THE SCARLET ANGEL, IN THE LISSOME FLESH...
WELL, WHAT DO YOU THINK, MISTER STRAY?

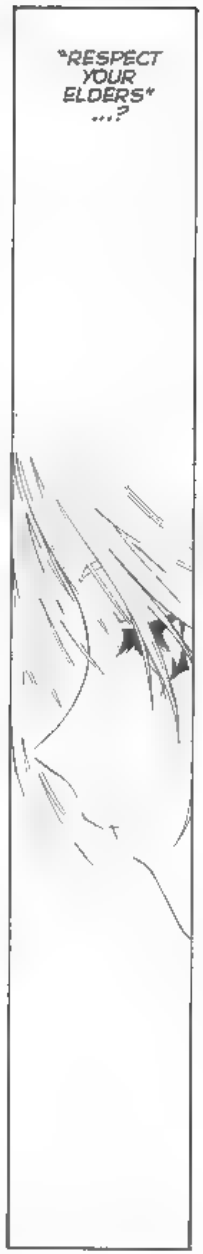
HAS SHE SPOTTED US YET...?
HAHH?

LET'S SEE...
NOPE.
WE SHOULD BE FINE, HERE.
SHE'S NEVER EVEN SEEN YOU BEFORE, GIZEH...
...AND AS FOR ME...
...THE LAST TIME SHE SAW ME, I WAS WEARIN' A DIFFERENT FACE.
AND, HEY, DON'T FOR-GET...

...WE GOT THE WIDDLE BIDDY BOY WITH JS, DON'T WE? THROWS OUR PROFILE OFF EVEN MORE...
...!
HUH? WHAT'S WITH THE FROWNY FACE, KIDDO?
SPEAK-ING OF FACES... IS THAT YOUR REAL ONE, STRAY?
WOULD HOPE NOT FOR YOUR SAKE

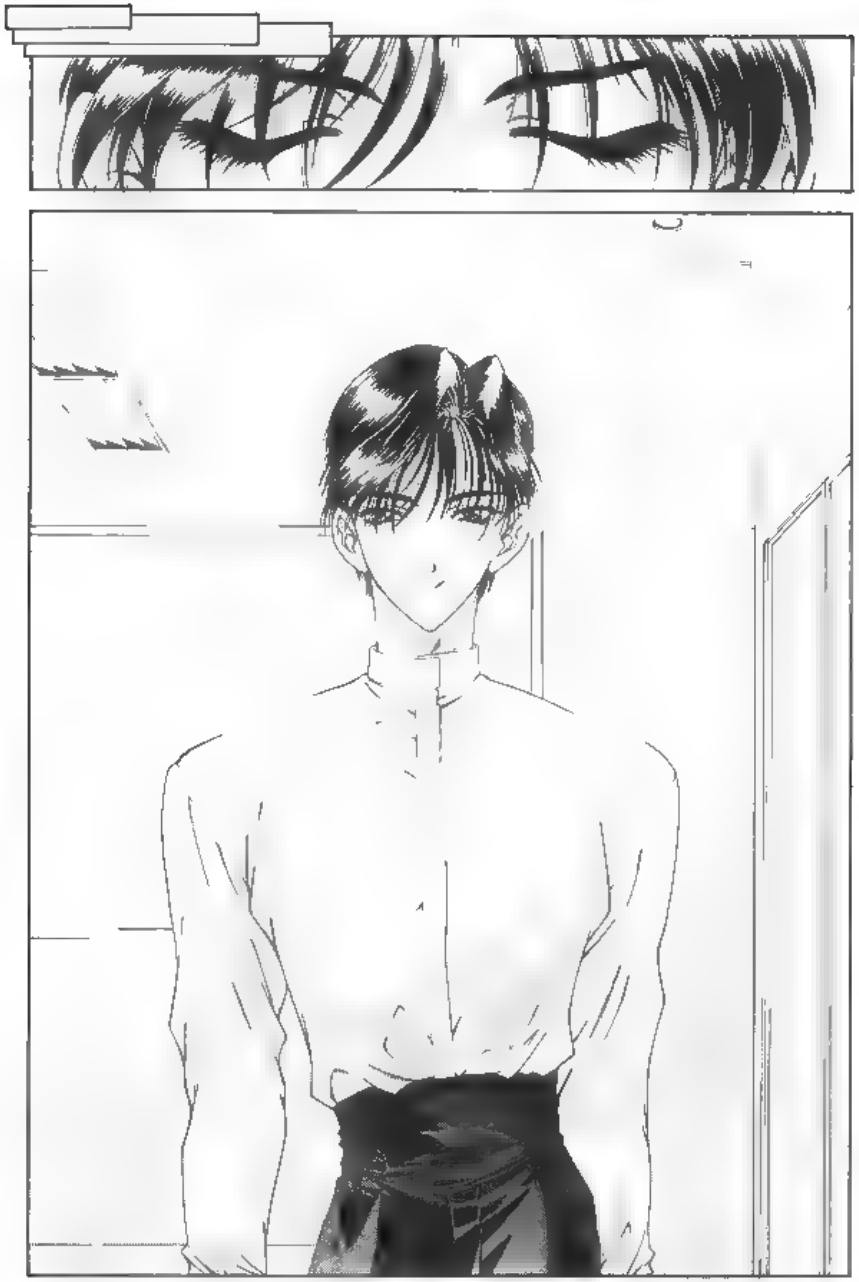
HEY, HEY, TONY BOY.
NOW, IS THAT ANY WAY TO TALK TO YOUR SUPERI-ORS?
IF YOU DON'T RESPECT YOUR ELDERS, YOU'LL NEVER MAKE IT IN THIS WORLD, KIDDO...
SHMPP
SHMPP
WHAPP

I'M NOT A CHILD... AND DON'T TOUCH ME.
DON'T CALL ME "TONY," EITHER.
WHOA... I'M SO SCARED.
SEE WHAT I MEAN? YOU SOUND SO DAMN CHILDISH.
RIGHT. AND TEASING TEAM MEMBERS LIKE YOU DO ISN'T CHILDISH, HUH...?

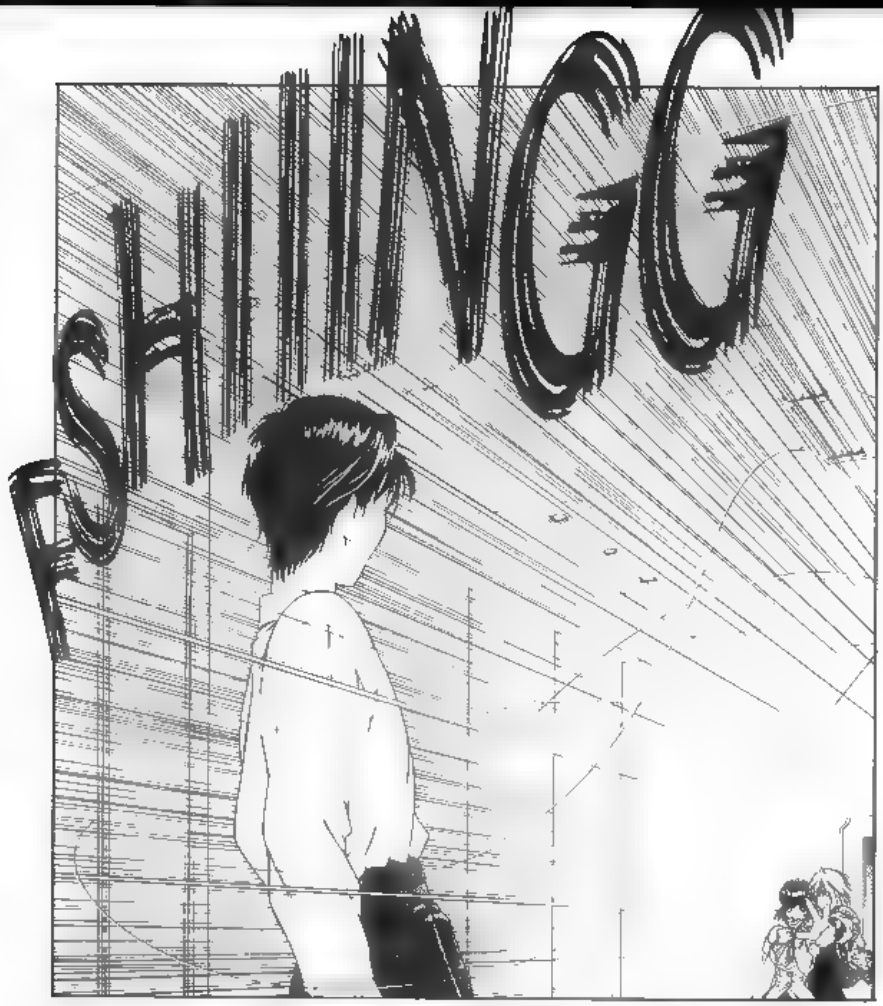


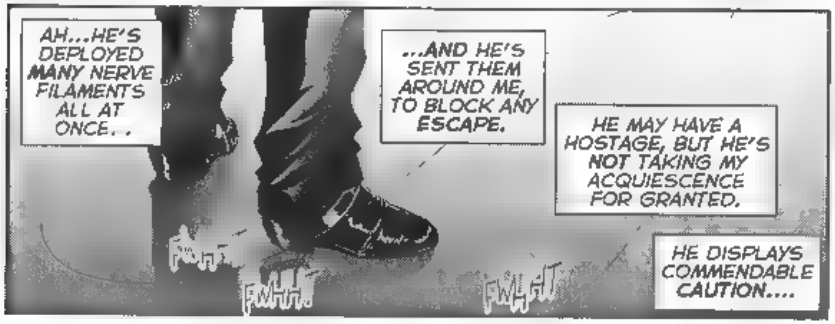
WELL, MAYBE I WOULD RESPECT YOU... IF YOU DESERVED MY RESPECT!

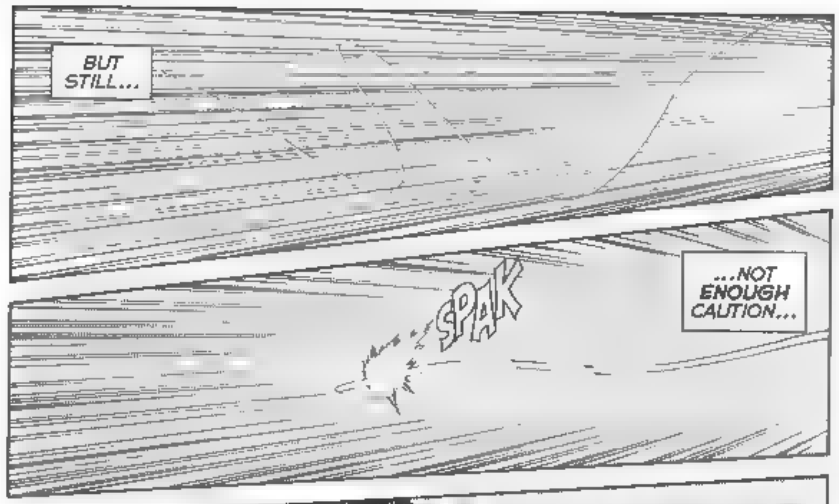
YEAH...IF YOU WERE LIKE HIM...



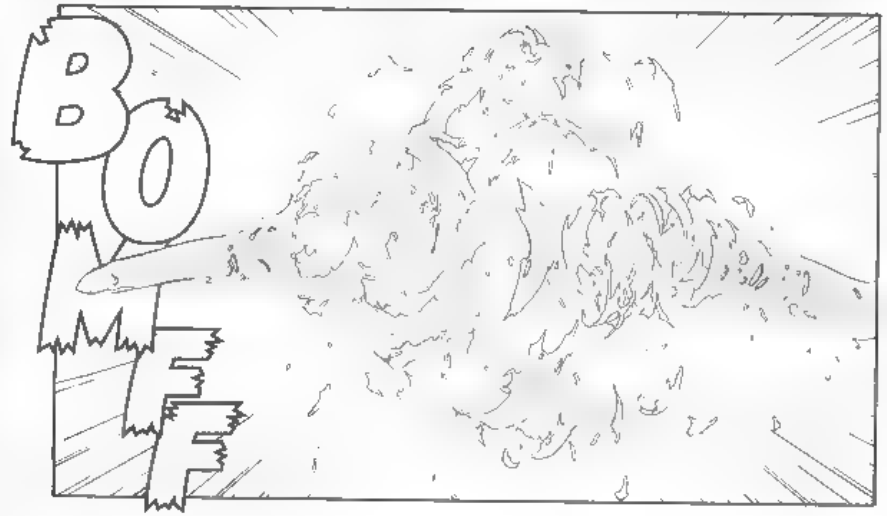
WHAT'S WITH THIS IDIOT, JUST SMILING LIKE THAT, WHEN I HAVE HIS WOMAN AS A HOSTAGE...?
I KNEW IT.
I KNEW IT...HE THINKS THAT I'M JUST A KID... THAT I'M NOTHING...
SKRNKK
DON'T YOU MOCK ME!
WHOOSH


SHIINGG


AH...HE'S DEPLOYED MANY NERVE FILAMENTS ALL AT ONCE..
...AND HE'S SENT THEM AROUND ME, TO BLOCK ANY ESCAPE.
HE MAY HAVE A HOSTAGE, BUT HE'S NOT TAKING MY ACQUIESCENCE FOR GRANTED.
HE DISPLAYS COMMENDABLE CAUTION....
FWHT
FWHT
FWHT

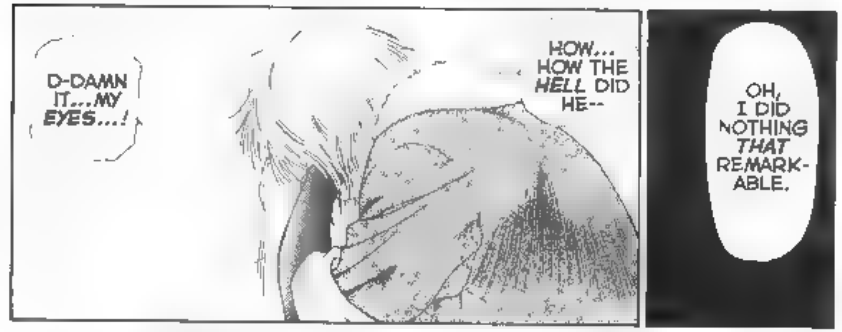

BUT STILL...
SPAK
...NOT ENOUGH CAUTION...

...FOR SOMEONE WITH THE MISFORTUNE. .
...TO BE FACING ME!

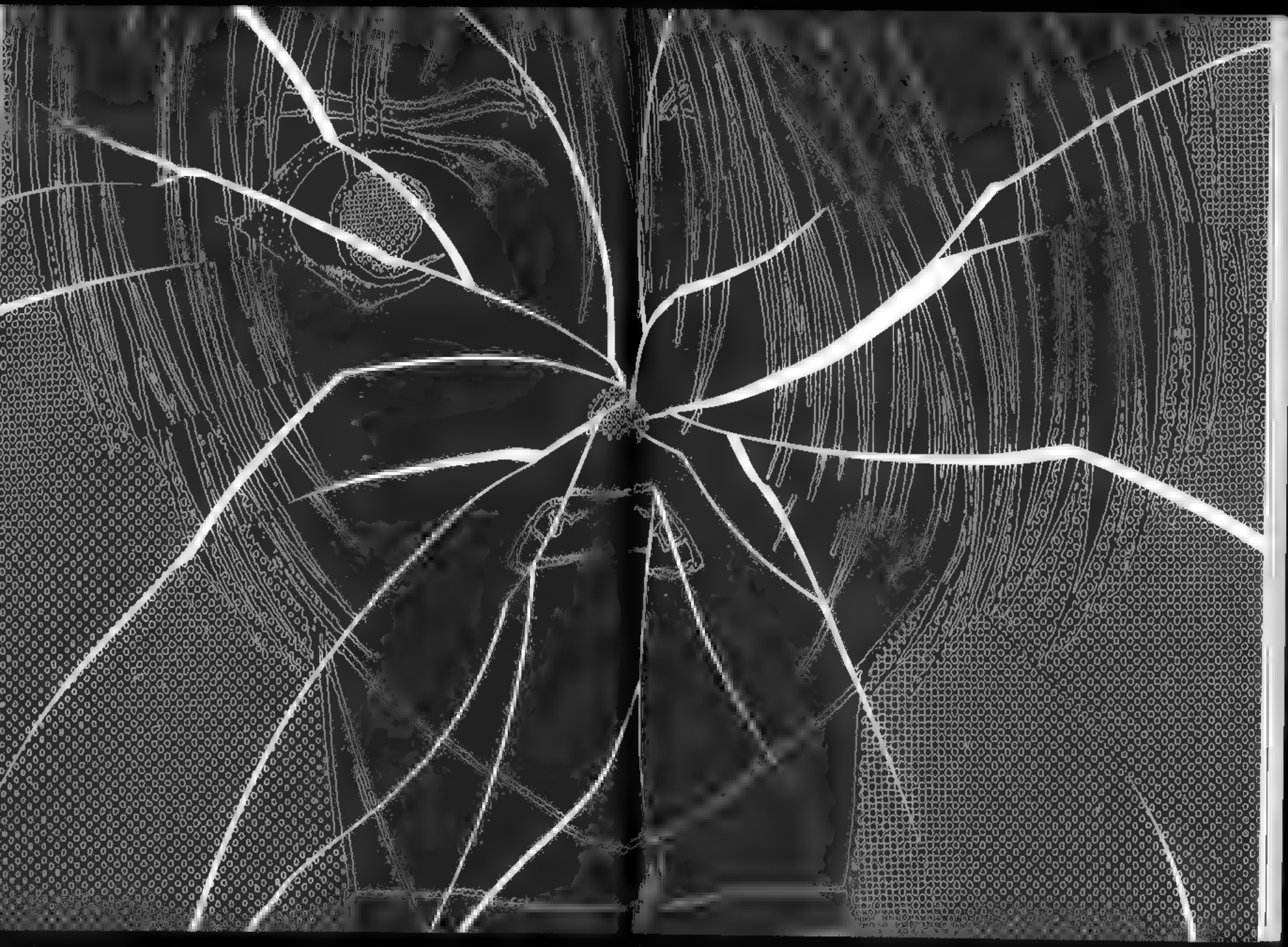

BOOF

GAAA!
chOOM
KCHOOM

GKK


D-DAMN IT...MY EYES...!
HOW... HOW THE HELL DID HE--
OH, I DID NOTHING THAT REMARK-ABLE.

I SIMPLY CONVERTED YOUR EXTRUDED NERVE FIBERS INTO HIGH-INTENSITY LIGHT-EMITTING FILAMENTS.
?!
YOU WANT TO KNOW, DON'T YOU...?
SPZZK
NNHH
YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT I AM... WELL, LET ME SHOW YOU.



SPLT
PLSH
PLTT

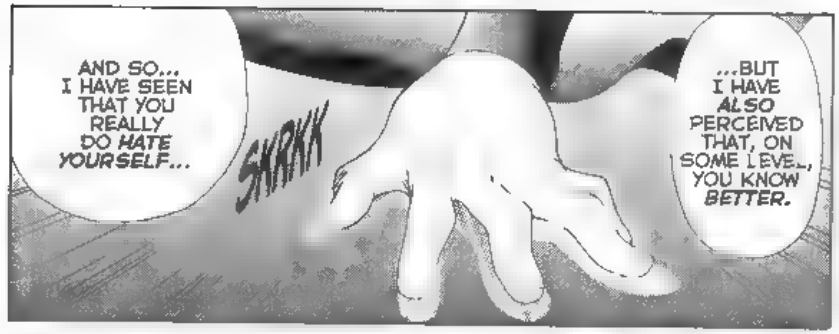
IS...IS THAT... TRUE...?

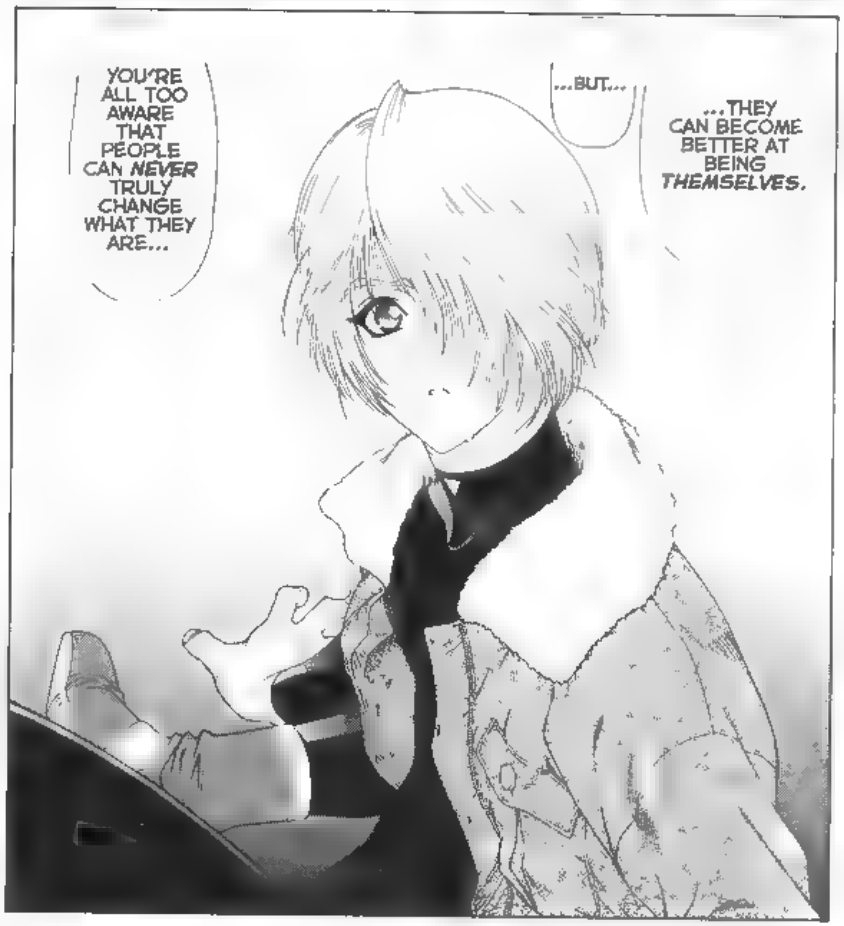
WH...WHAT I JUST... *SAW*...
...WHAT I JUST *EXPERI-ENCED*... IS IT... *TRUE*...?

OR...
...WOULD YOU *DENY* YOUR OWN TELEPATHIC POWERS ...?

YOU LOOKED DIRECTLY INTO MY *MIND*, DIDN'T YOU?
HOW COULD I POSSIBLY *LIE* TO YOU IN THAT STATE?

JUST AS YOU "SAW" INTO ME, I WAS ABLE TO SEE INTO YOU.
ACT 51


AND SO... I HAVE SEEN THAT YOU REALLY DO HATE YOURSELF...
SKRKK
...BUT I HAVE ALSO PERCEIVED THAT, ON SOME LEVEL, YOU KNOW BETTER.


YOU'RE ALL TOO AWARE THAT PEOPLE CAN NEVER TRULY CHANGE WHAT THEY ARE...
...BUT...
...THEY CAN BECOME BETTER AT BEING THEMSELVES.

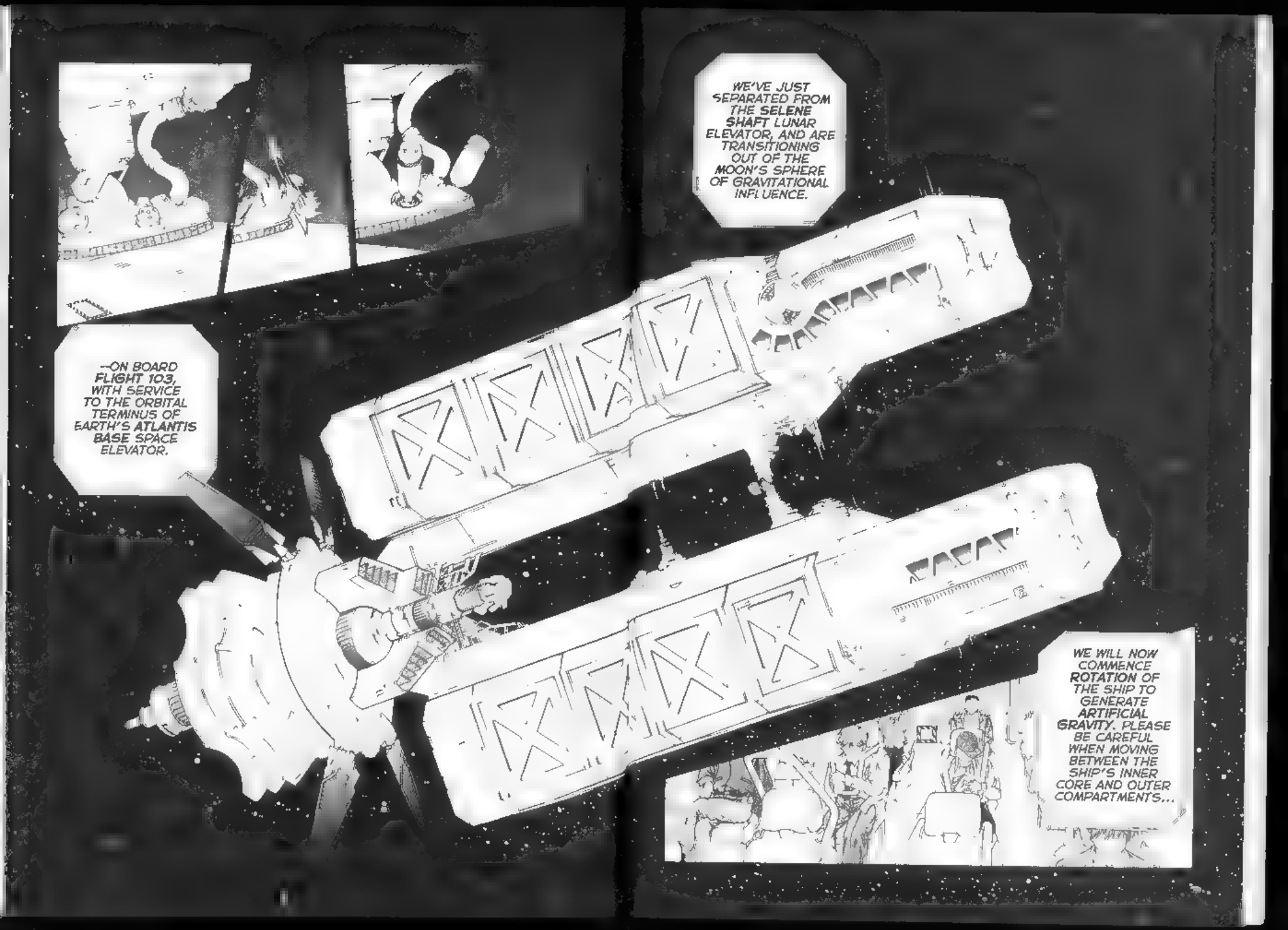
BY *BELIEVING* IN THEM-SELVES.

UM, DIRECTOR HEIDE-MANN...? I NEED TO TE... YOU...
...IF I DON'T KEEP USING MY POWERS TO ACTIVATE THEM, MY ORGANIC NERVE FILAMENTS WILL BREAK DOWN AND BE ABSORBED BY THE HOST'S BODY.
SHE WON'T BE LEFT WITH ANY SCARS, OR ANY OTHER LASTING AFTER-EFFECTS...
I SEE. THAT'S GOOD TO--
AH!
S-SIR!
I...
WHAT I SAW... IN YOUR MIND...
THE FUTURE THAT YOU WANT TO CREATE...? W-WELL, WHAT YOU'RE CONTEM-PLATING...
...IT'S JUST... IT'S EXACTLY THE PLACE I'M SEEKING... MY PLACE IN THE WORLD...!
A-AND I'D LIKE TO...HELP MAKE IT COME TO PASS ...!

IF YOU COULD USE MY HELP, DIRECTOR HEIDE-MANN... I'D LIKE TO--
AH...?
YOU CAN CALL ME "APEP" IF YOU LIKE, MISTER HADROBUTTE.
DIDN'T I JUST TELL YOU...?
JUST AS YOU UNDERSTOOD ME, I CAME TO UNDERSTAND YOU PERFECTLY.
AND IF WE DO INDEED UNDER-STAND EACH OTHER, THEN...
...DON'T YOU THINK THAT WE COULD BE FRIENDS...?

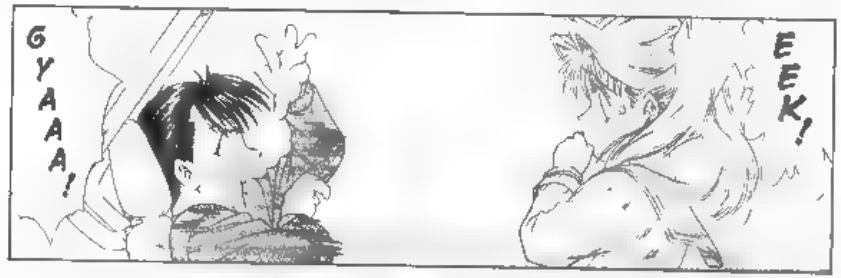
OH.
OF COURSE, I KNOW THAT I'M *OLDER* THAN YOU... SO, IF IT'S *TROUBLING* FOR YOU TO USE MY FIRST NAME, JUST CALL ME WHAT YOU WISH.
BUT THERE'S REALLY NO NEED TO BE *FORMAL*.
UM... MY *NAME*, SIR...?
...IT'S, WELL... *ANTHONY* ...!
APEP...

YO, THERE, SONNY BOY! YOU *HEARIN'* ME?
GET A *MOVE ON*, WILL YA?
WE GOT A *SHUTTLE* TO CATCH.
HEH...
EVERY-THING'S ARRANGED... YOU MAY *PROCEED* WITH THE OPERATION.
KLAK KLAK
KLAK KLAK KLAK


WE'VE JUST SEPARATED FROM THE SELENE SHAFT LUNAR ELEVATOR, AND ARE TRANSITIONING OUT OF THE MOON'S SPHERE OF GRAVITATIONAL INFLUENCE.
--ON BOARD FLIGHT 103, WITH SERVICE TO THE ORBITAL TERMINUS OF EARTH'S ATLANTIS BASE SPACE ELEVATOR.
WE WILL NOW COMMENCE ROTATION OF THE SHIP TO GENERATE ARTIFICIAL GRAVITY. PLEASE BE CAREFUL WHEN MOVING BETWEEN THE SHIP'S INNER CORE AND OUTER COMPARTMENTS...

SO...I'M FINALLY BIDDING FAREWELL TO THE MOON...
IT'S SO STRANGE...
I FEEL LIKE I'M LEAVING HERE AS A TOTALLY DIFFERENT PERSON THAN WHEN I ARRIVED...
SO MUCH HAS HAPPENED...

IT SEEMS LIKE, SOMEHOW, FROM TIME TO TIME... THE MOON KEEPS CHANGING MY LIFE FOREVER...


GYAAA!
EEK!

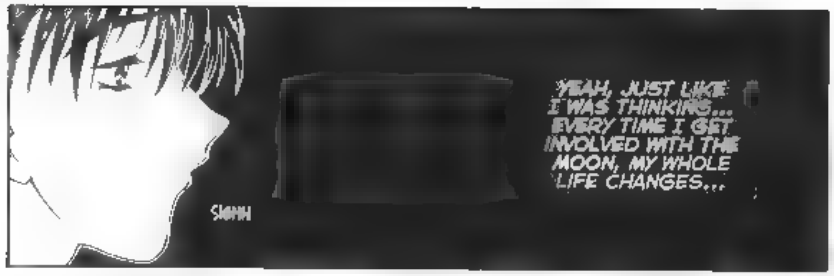
WH... ...WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT ...?!
WHEN SOMEONE'S WORRIED ABOUT YOU, YOU SCREAM IN HER FACE...?!
HJH ...?
YOU WERE WORRIED ...?

WELL, SURE! I MEAN, EVEN WHEN THE SECURITY GATE OPENED, YOU JUST STOOD THERE! AND NOT JUST ON THIS SHUTTLE...YOU'VE BEEN ACTING STRANGE A... THROUGHOUT THIS TRIP. .
YEAH! YOU'VE BEEN ALL CLAMMED UP EVER SINCE WE BOARDED THE LUNAR ORBITAL ELEVATOR!
FMPP
'EE_ING SHPACE-SHICK, KIDDO...?
NO, NO, IT'S NOT THAT...
WELL, THEN, WHAT IS IT?
WELL... MY FATHER DIED...
...ON THE ORBITAL ELE-VATOR.

ACT 52

MY FATHER WAS AN *EXOTERRESTRIAL ARCHITECT*... HE TRAVELED TO THE MOON ON A *TECHNOLOGY EXCHANGE* PROGRAM.
HE WAS STUDYING THE LUNAR ORBITAL ELEVATOR WHEN, WELL... AN *ACCIDENT* HAPPENED.

...
WHSHH
I'M SO SORRY, SUNAO...!
I DIDN'T... I NEVER KNEW... THAT *UNCLE OUMI* DIED THAT WAY...
H-HEY... DON'T MAKE SUCH A *FUSS*, KEI...!
IT ALL HAPPENED A *LONG TIME AGO*, OKAY...?


SIGHH
YEAH, JUST LIKE I WAS THINKING... EVERY TIME I GET INVOLVED WITH THE MOON, MY WHOLE LIFE CHANGES...

UH, YEAH... WELL, UM, GOSH...!
WHAT CAN I SAY, BUT--
LET'S EAT!

GOOD FOOD MAKES FOR GOOD FEELINGS, RIGHT?
A FULL TUMMY WILL MAKE YOU FEEL SO MUCH BETTER, DON'T YOU THINK?
NO, KEI!
FWAPP

HAH?
AWW, WHY NOT, ATTIM?
FIRST, WE HAVE TO SET UP OUR EMERGENCY ESCAPE ROUTE.
NEXT, A FULL CABIN SECURITY CHECK.
BUT, OF MORE RELE-VANCE TO YOU...

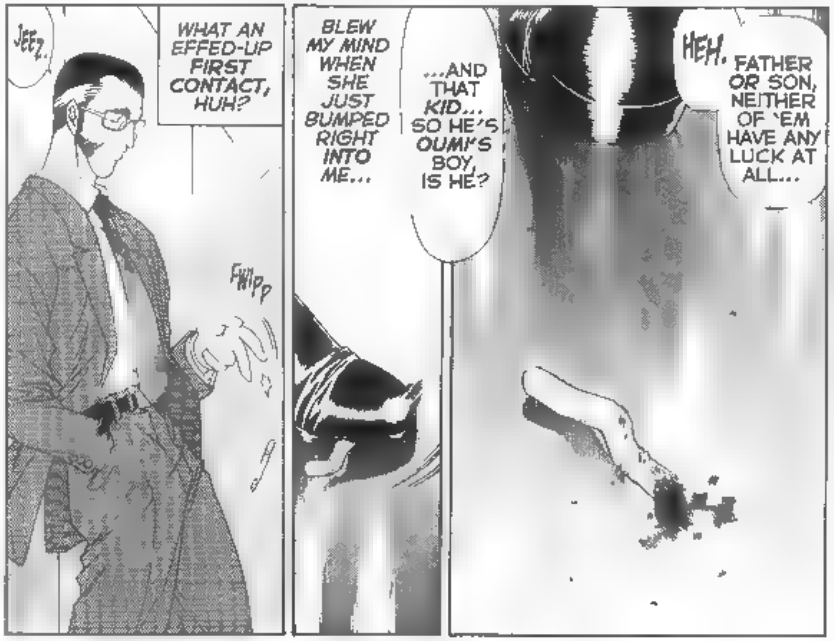
...ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THIS, DEAR?
HMM?
AFTER ALL, IF YOU STUFF YOURSELF IN LOW GRAVITY...
...YOU DO KNOW THAT YOU'LL BALLOON UP LIKE A PIGGY, DON'T YOU?

HGRKK

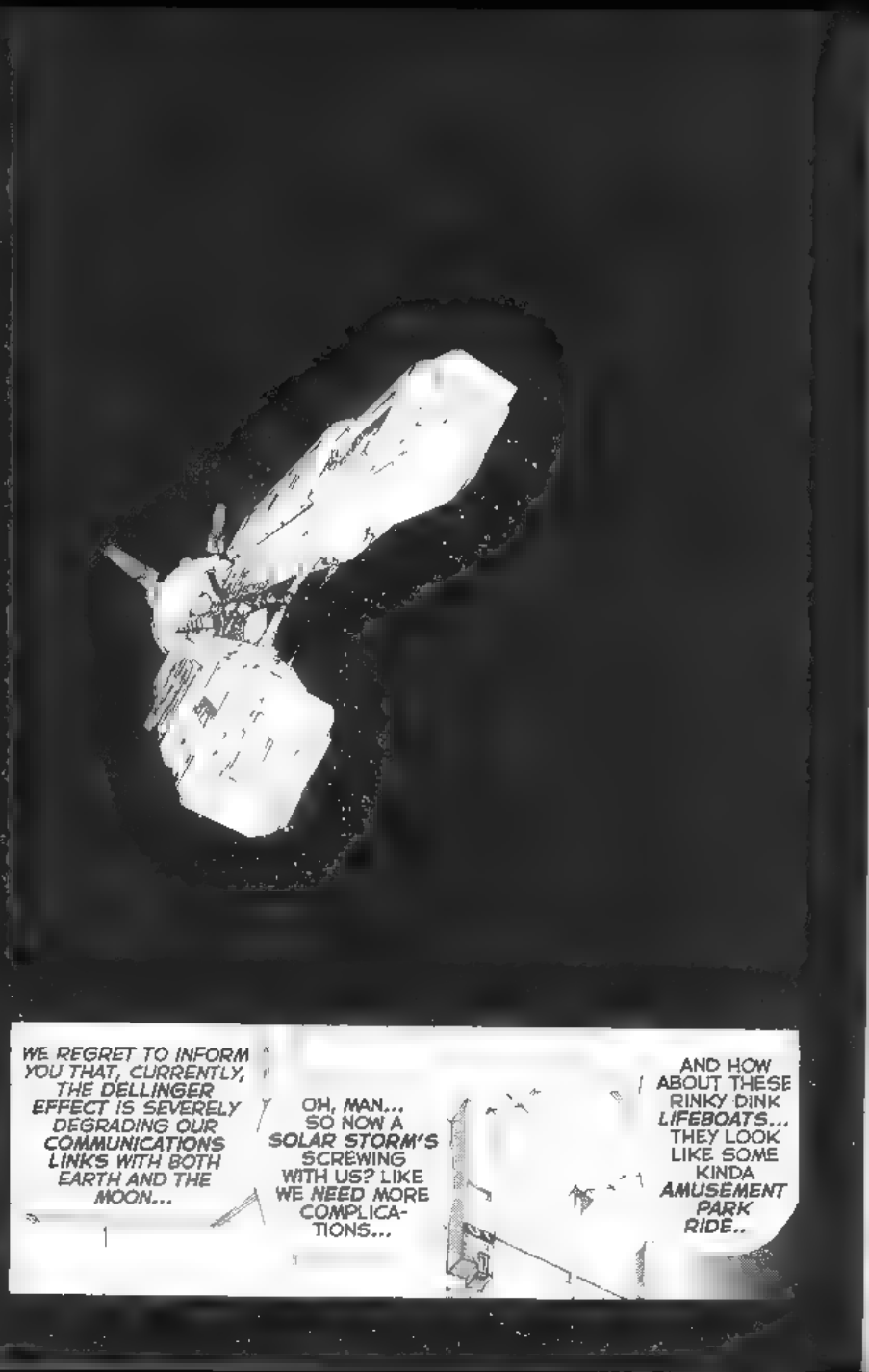
HUH
HUH
H-HEY
HUH ...!
NOW, REALLY, ATTIM...!
SUNAO WILL BE EATING, NOT ME! SUNAO WILL BE DOING THE BALLOONING UP, UNDERSTAND?
ISN'T THAT RIGHT, SUNAO?
UM...UH, RIGHT...!
HMFF!
WHAT ARE ALL OF YOU SMIRKING ABOUT?
FINE! SEE IF I CARE!
THAP
OH!
LOOK OUT, KEI!
THERE'S SOMEONE BEHIND YOU--!

AAA
OOF!
EEK!
WHPP
UM...I'M SO VERY SORRY!
PLEASE FORGIVE ME, WON'T YOU...?
WE'RE TERRIBLY SORRY, SIR. ARE YOU ALL RIGHT...?
PLEASE EXCUSE OUR FRIEND...

NAH, DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME.
SO... IS THE LITTLE LADY OKAY?
I'M REALLY, REALLY, REALLY SORRY!
KEI, LOOK WHERE YOU'RE GOING...! BUT BUT
HEY, I'M FINE, TOOTS.
PSHTT


JEEZ.
WHAT AN EFFED-UP FIRST CONTACT, HUH?
FWIPP
BLEW MY MIND WHEN SHE JUST BUMPED RIGHT INTO ME...
...AND THAT KID... SO HE'S OUMI'S BOY, IS HE?
HEH.
FATHER OR SON, NEITHER OF 'EM HAVE ANY LUCK AT ALL...

ACT 53


WE REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT, CURRENTLY, THE DELLINGER EFFECT IS SEVERELY DEGRADING OUR COMMUNICATIONS LINKS WITH BOTH EARTH AND THE MOON...
OH, MAN... SO NOW A SOLAR STORM'S SCREWING WITH US? LIKE WE NEED MORE COMPLICATIONS...
AND HOW ABOUT THESE RINKY DINK LIFEBOATS... THEY LOOK LIKE SOME KINDA AMUSEMENT PARK RIDE..

DON'T THEY, THOUGH...? I CAN'T WAIT TO RIDE IN ONE WITH YOU, SUNAO...
UM... KEI...?
THOUGH WITH REN ABOARD, THE LIFEBOAT WOULD BE MORE OF A HORROR HOUSE RIDE, DON'T YOU THINK?
COULD SHE POSSIBLY BE ANY MORE OF AN ANNOYING BRAT?
KRAKKL
KRAKKL
BREEP
I'LL SPEAK TO YOU LATER, THEN, SIR.
HRMM.

KLIK
PLINKK
?!

YOU HAVE THE WRONG ROOM, YOUNG MAN.
I DIDN'T ORDER ROOM SERVICE--
OH? IT'S ME, PROFESSOR.
YOU?!
DO YOU RECALL THE QUESTION I ASKED YOU DURING OUR PREVIOUS CHAT, SIR?
WELL, WHAT WILL YOUR ANSWER BE? I BELIEVE YOUR OPTIONS HAVE NARROWED A TAD...
SHKK
WHAT ARE YOU SUGGESTING?

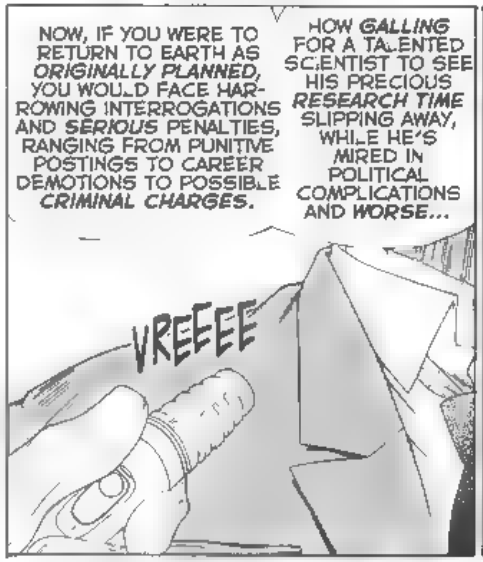
DON'T YOU KNOW, DOCTOR HEIDE-MANN?
OH, GOOD-NESS ME...YOU DON'T!
IN ADDITION TO THE FORMIDABLE [redacted] M-ZAK, YOU NOW HAVE ANOTHER U.N. AGENT IN TOW, DON'T YOU?
BUT THIS REN FELLOW ISN'T HERE FOR YOUR PROTECTION, YOU KNOW.
NOT AT ALL.
RATHER, HE'S HERE TO KEEP WATCH ON YOU.
FOR, ALAS, IT SEEMS THAT OUR LITTLE SECRET IS OUT, AFTER ALL.
THE U.N. KNOWS THAT WE'VE BEEN TRYING TO RECRUIT YOU, PROFESSOR.

WH--
APPARENTLY, THE HOSPITAL'S SECURITY SYSTEM RECORDED OUR EARLIER CONVERSATION.
BUT... THAT'S ABSURD! YOUR TERRORIST CAT'S-PAWS WERE IN CONTROL OF THE FACILITY, WEREN'T THEY?
IRONIC, ISN'T IT? APPARENTLY MY OWN USEFUL IDIOTS DIDN'T TRUST ME!
THEY KEPT ME UNDER SURVEIL-LANCE... IMAGINE THAT.
THESE DYKSTRA CORPORATION BASTARDS HAVE TRAPPED ME...AND THEY CLEARLY PLANNED IT THIS WAY ALL ALONG!
WAIT... "UNDER SURVEIL-LANCE"...?
!
FWAPP
AM I BEING MONITORED NOW...?!

Act 54

QUITE SO, DOCTOR. I'M AFRAID THAT YOUR TERRIBLY PARANOID CURRENT EMPLOYERS DO INDEED HAVE YOU WIRED...
STEP OVER HERE, PLEASE.

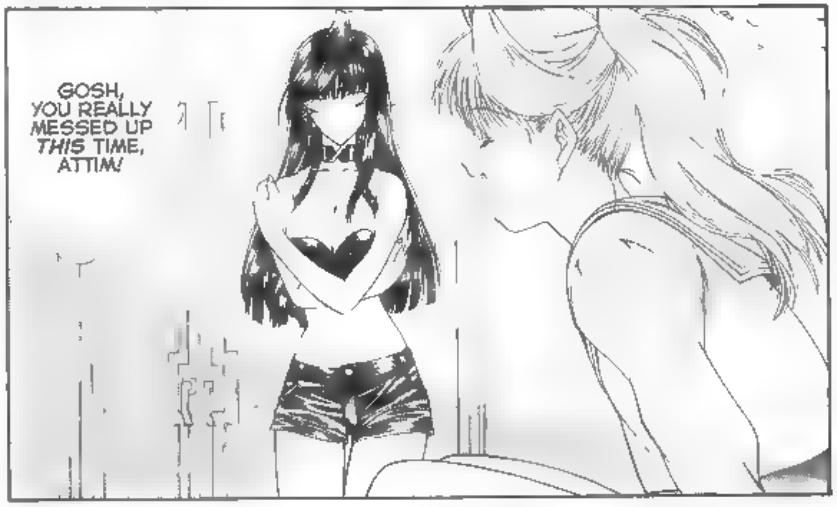
THIS IS A SIGNAL SCRAMBLER, SIR. WITH IT, WE'RE ALREADY SENDING A FALSE SIGNAL TO THE NEARBY RECEIVER... NOW, WE CAN GO ABOUT DECOMMISSIONING THE TRANSMITTER PLANTED ON YOU.


NOW, IF YOU WERE TO RETURN TO EARTH AS ORIGINALLY PLANNED, YOU WOULD FACE HARROWING INTERROGATIONS AND SERIOUS PENALTIES, RANGING FROM PUNITIVE POSTINGS TO CAREER DEMOTIONS TO POSSIBLE CRIMINAL CHARGES.
HOW GALLING FOR A TALENTED SCIENTIST TO SEE HIS PRECIOUS RESEARCH TIME SLIPPING AWAY, WHILE HE'S MIRED IN POLITICAL COMPLICATIONS AND WORSE...
VREEEE

...

CORPORATE HEADHUNTING ISN'T A CRIME, PROFESSOR.
YOU SHOULD SWITCH AFFILIATIONS, SIR. YOU'D GAIN FAR SUPERIOR LABORATORY FACILITIES, AND A MOST IMPRESSIVE COMPENSATION PACKAGE.
WHAT RESEARCHER, HOWEVER DEDICATED, WOULDN'T DESIRE THAT...?

DID WE HAVE TO SHARE A CABIN TOGETHER LIKE THIS, AGAIN...?


GOSH, YOU REALLY MESSED UP THIS TIME, ATTIM!

TRUE, PROTECTING KEI IS MY MISSION, OF COURSE...AND YET...
BACK ON THE MOON, IN THAT WIMPY LUNAR GRAVITY, YOU COULD'VE MADE AN ABSOLUTELY HUMONGOUS CAKE, ONE THAT COULD NEVER EXIST IN EARTH'S GRAVITY...!
LIKE THIS!

CONSIDERING KEI'S CONTINUING FLASHBACKS AND HER NEED FOR COUNSELING, SHOULDN'T SHE BE BUNKED WITH NURSE HISHIKA...?
NOW THAT WE'RE HEADED BACK HOME, I GUESS THIS SHUTTLE REPRESENTS YOUR VERY LAST CHANCE TO BAKE A SUPER BIG LOW-GEE CAKE FOR ME, DOESN'T IT?

LOOKY, ATTIM! THIS ONE SOUNDS TOTALLY YUMMY!
AND IT'S SOOOO CUTE! IT'S PER-FECT!
I CAN'T WAIT TO TRY ONE OF YOUR BAKING CREA-TIONS, ATTIM!
DROOL
UM...AH...OF COURSE, DEAR...BUT, UNFORTUNATELY, I DON'T HAVE ANY INGREDIENTS OR COOKING UTENSILS HERE...!
SO ANY BAKING WILL HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL WE RETURN TO THE EARTH...
...OKAY...?
OH, DARN, THAT'S RIGHT...! AND THE SHUTTLE CAFETERIA ONLY HAS FACILITIES FOR REHEATING MEAL POUCHES AND FROZEN FOOD...

OH, WAIT! SO THEY DO HAVE A SIMPLE FORM OF KITCHEN, THEN!
PINGG!
SO MAYBE THEY CAN HANDLE MORE COMPLI-CATED STUFF, HUH?
I'LL HAVE TO ASK, RIGHT NOW!
KCHAK
GAKK-!
KE!! H-HOLD ON A MOMENT ...!
THIS WOULD BE A HUGE HASSLE FOR ME UH, I MEAN, A HUGE HASSLE FOR THE CAFETERIA STAFF!
...AND... IN LOW-GEE ENVIRONMENTS LIKE THIS, THE CONVECTION CURRENTS ARE ALL SCREWY, THERE'RE PROBLEMS WITH CORIOLIS FORCES... AND...UH...
BURKE
GULPP
S-SORRY ...!
IT'S HAP-PENED AGAIN, ATTIM! LOOK!

"AGAIN"...?
WHY DOES EVERY STUPID THING I TOUCH HAVE TO BREAK DOWN LIKE THIS...?
I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING...!
WELL, WELL, WELL...KEI'S INVOLUNTARY ELECTRONIC DISRUPTION POWER IS NORMALLY AN ANNOYANCE, BUT THIS TIME IT SAVED MY BEHIND...!
DUMB OL' STATIC ELECTRICITY!
?!
KSHH!!
SKZZZK
THAT PECULIAR STATIC ON THE LINE...IS A SIGNAL SCRAMBLER IN USE, SOMEWHERE ON THIS SHUTTLE...?

EEK!
FMPP
UM... ATTIM...? DID I B-BJST THE PHONE FOR GOOD, SOMEHOW...? I DIDN'T MEAN TO, YOU KNOW... REALLY!
ARE YOU, UM... ANGRY WITH ME...?
NO, KEI.
HMM... ACCORDING TO THE TRACER SIGNAL, YOU SEEM TO BE BEHAVING YOURSELF, PROFESSOR HEIDEMANN...

...BUT ARE YOU REALLY ...?
ATTIM...?
PERHAPS I'M JUST BEING A BIT PARANOID, HERE...BUT I HAVE TO GO CHECK ON SOMETHING.
AND SO...
I'LL TAKE THAT, THANK YOU
YOU'RE CLEARLY TOO DANGEROUS TO BE LEFT ALONE WITH A COOKBOOK.
OH!

HUH?

?
?
I SAID, TAKE OFF YOUR CLOTHES, SUNAO
SHRK
L-LOOK, REN...YOU CAN STOP WITH THE JOKES, OKAY...?
JOKES?

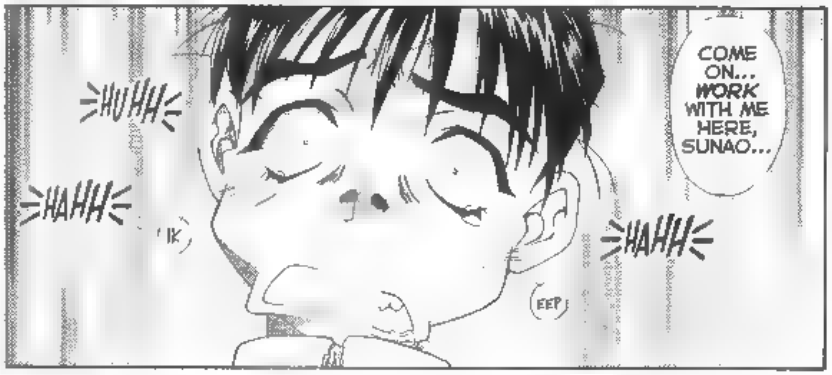
NO, SUNAO, I'M NOT JOKING
RIGHT NOW, I'M IN "DEADLY SERIOUS MODE"...!
I'M PUTTING THAT BODY OF YOURS UNDER CLOSE SCRUTINY, WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT.
RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW!
SNAP
P!
THMPP

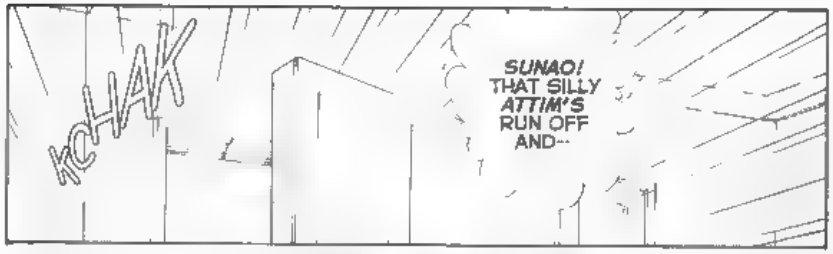
FWH!
PP
KREEEK
I'VE WANTED TO SEE YOU *UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL*, FROM THE MOMENT WE MET, SUNAO.
OH, YES.
GYAAAA!

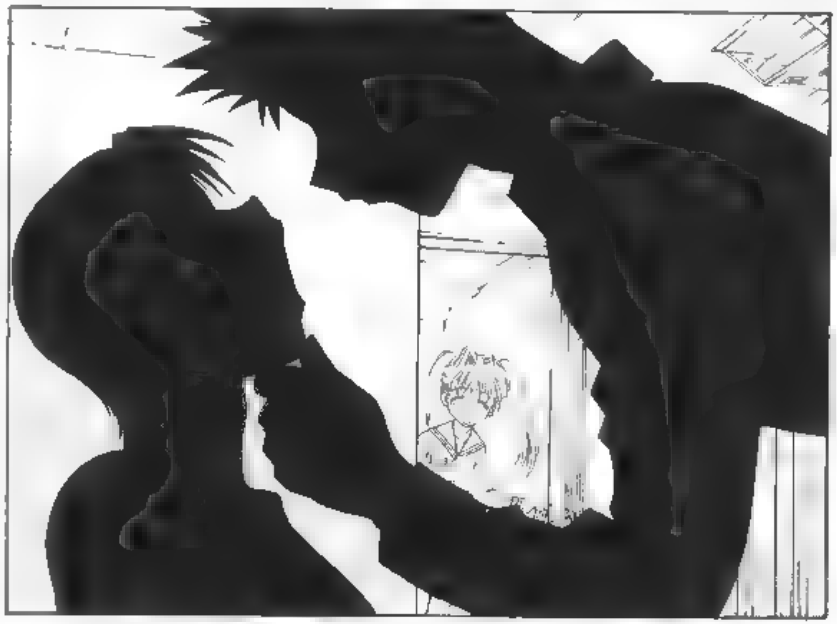
EVER SINCE I FIRST LAID EYES ON YOU, BACK DURING THAT *BATTLE* AT THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT LAB...
♪GULP♪
♪GLKK♪
THAT'S *RIGHT*, MY BOY...
...I'VE BEEN *WATCHING* YOU.
KREEK

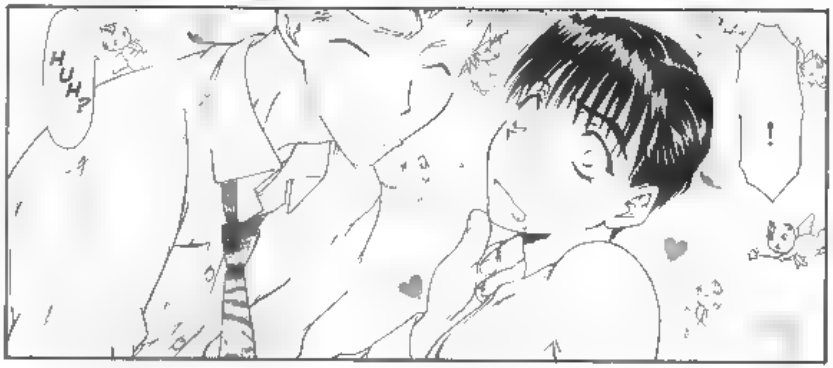
Act 55

WUH... WUH... WAIT A SECOND...!
UM...ER... W-WELL...
BACK OFF, WON'T YOU...? PLEASE...?
JUST... JUST GET AWAY FROM ME...!
HEH... AH, REN...? THIS IS KIND OF...UH....

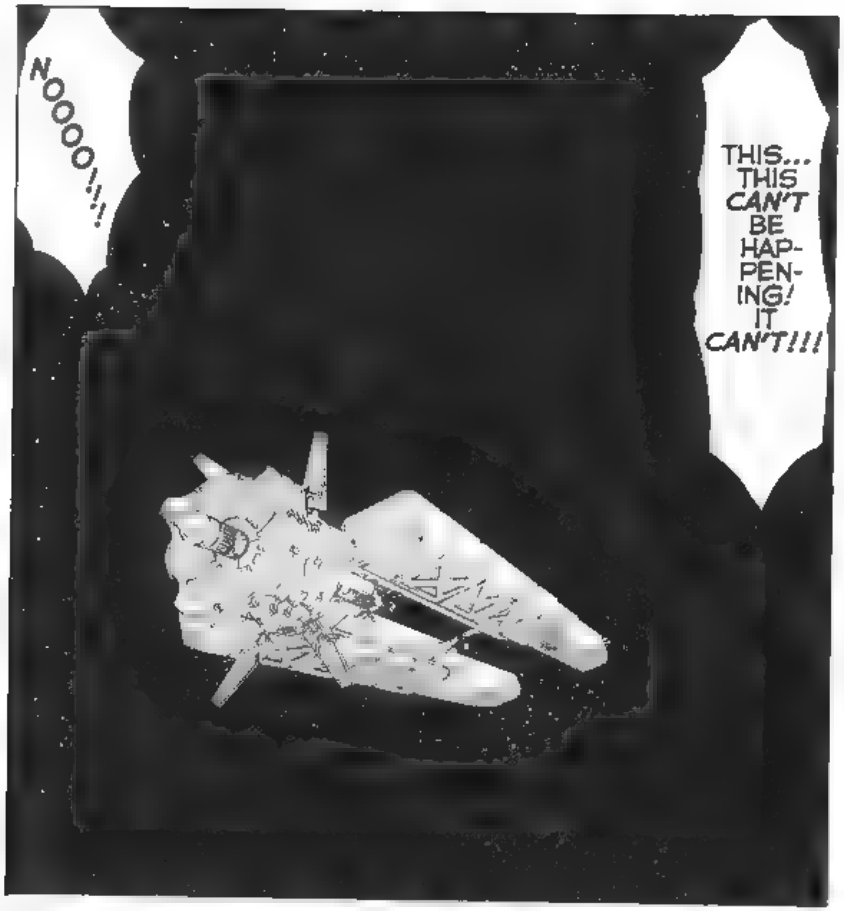

HUHH
HAHH
(K)
COME ON... WORK WITH ME HERE, SUNAO...
HAHH
(EEP)

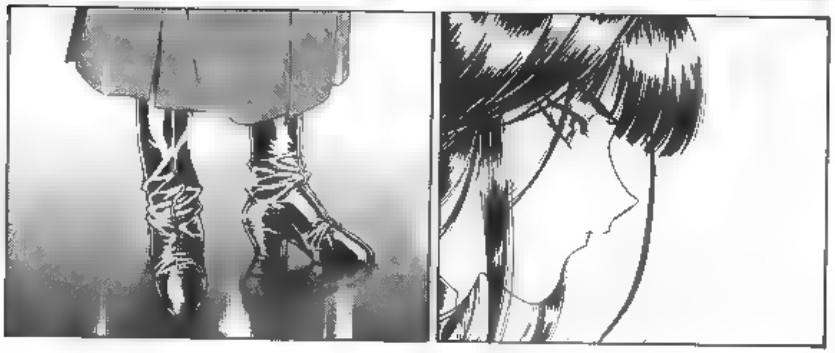

KCHAK
SUNAO! THAT SILLY ATTIM'S RUN OFF AND--




HUH?
!

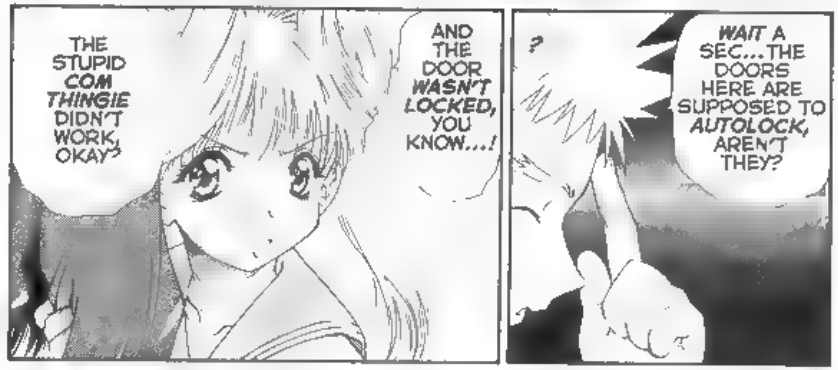
KREEK
K
C
H
A
K


NOOOO!!!
THIS... THIS CAN'T BE HAP-PEN-ING! IT CAN'T!!!



FWHMPP
A-A-ATTIM...!
!!!
GAKK
SNIFF SNIFF
BOBBB

MAN, OH, MAN...! JUST BARGING RIGHT INTO A GUY'S CABIN, WITHOUT EVEN KNOCKING ...EVER HEAR OF THE WORD "DISCRETION," LITTLE LADY?
WHY DO YOU THINK THEY INVENTED DOOR-COMS?
WHSH


THE STUPID COM THINGIE DIDN'T WORK, OKAY?
AND THE DOOR WASN'T LOCKED, YOU KNOW...!
?
WAIT A SEC...THE DOORS HERE ARE SUPPOSED TO AUTOLOCK, AREN'T THEY?

OH, REN... IS THERE SOME REASON WHY YOU D DN'T CHECK PROFESSOR HEIDEMANN'S CABIN F.RST, AS I ASKED...?
WHY? I'M BUNKING WITH SUNAO, AFTER ALL...
...SO I FIG-JRED I'D CHECK HIS CABIN FIRST.
WELL, LET'S GO LOOK IN ON THE GOOD DOCTOR NOW, SHA.. WE?
KEI...I NEED YOU TO GO TO NURSE HISHIKA'S CABIN FOR A BIT, ALL RIGHT?
GO WITH HER, SUNAO.
NO!!!
!
KE , THAT WASN'T WHAT IT LOOKED L KE.
SUNAO... EN INFORMED YOU ABOUT YOUR STATUS AS A PROVISIONAL AGENT...?

I DON'T LIKE TO DO THIS...BUT, GIVEN THE WAY THINGS ARE GOING, I'M AFRAID YOU'RE LIKELY TO BE FIELD-TESTED LONG BEFORE YOU'VE HAD ANY ACTUAL TRAINING...
?!
SUNAO, MY BOY...
...YOU HAVE SOME DECENT MUSCLE ON THESE SKINNY LI'L ARMS, YOU KNOW.
SHKK
SHKK
GYOWWCH!
WHAT THE HECK IS THIS FOR...?
HUH? HEY, KIDDO ...
...YOU VOLUNTEERED TO BECOME AN ALIEN ARTIFACT COUNTER-AGENT, DIDN'T YOU?
WHAT?!
THEY TOLD YOU, DIDN'T THEY? AND AN ACTIVE-DUTY AGENT, SUCH AS YOURS TRULY, WAS SUPPOSED TO CONDUCT A FULL EVALUATION ON YOU, RIGHT?

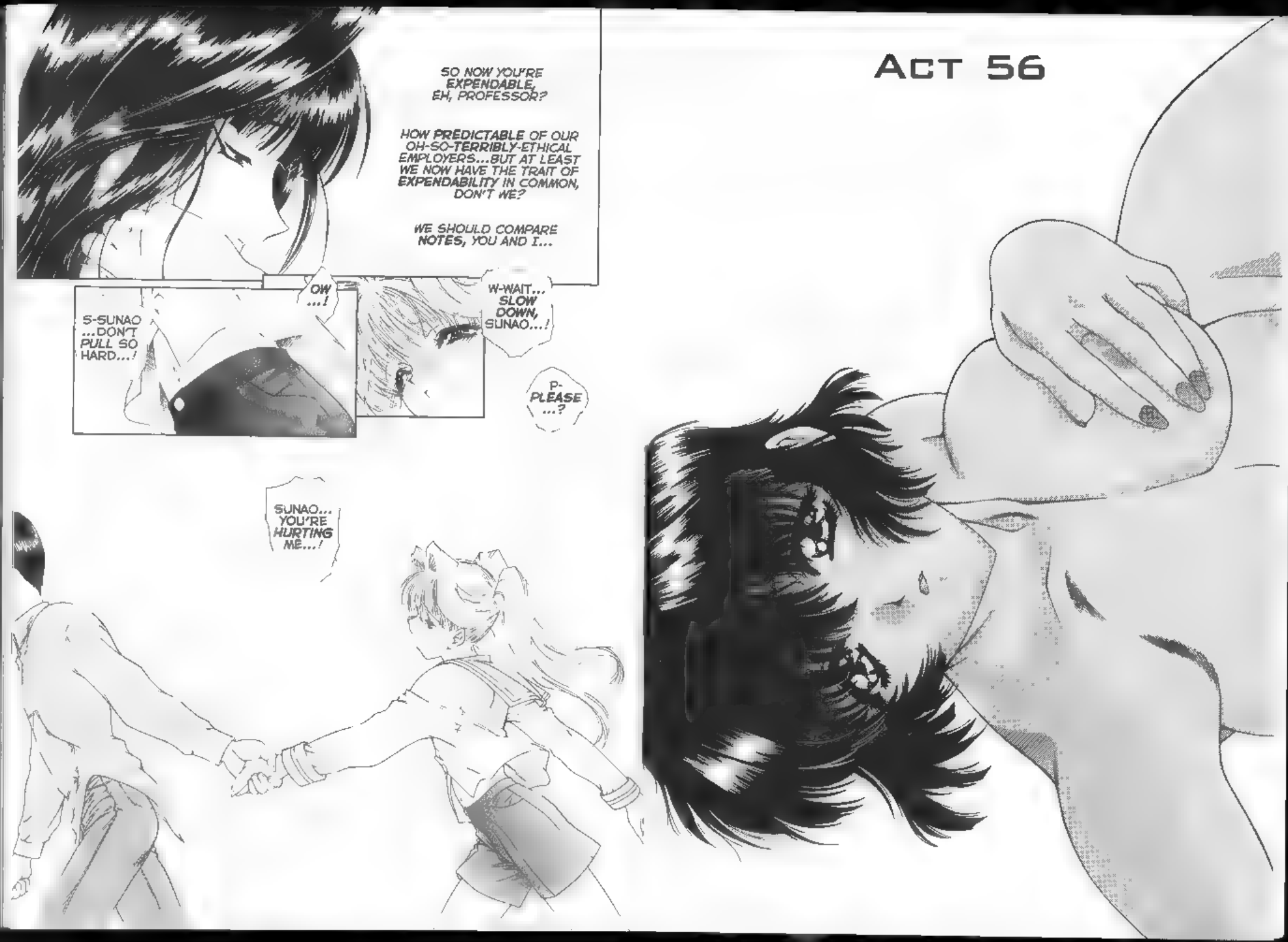
AH ...!
MISS M-ZAK, I HATE TO DISAGREE... BUT THE U.N. ALMOST CERTAINLY WON'T LET THIS BOY GO.
TOO MANY QUESTIONS REMAIN UNANSWERED, I'M AFRAID.
AFTER ALL, IT APPEARS THAT HE MAY BE ABLE TO STOP THE SENTINELS
WILL HE END UP AS A TEST SUBJECT TO BE EXPLOITED, LIKE M-
AGYAH!
IF I COOPERATE WITH YOUR SCIENTISTS, WILL YOU FINALLY TELL ME THE TRUTH ABOUT KEI?
I DIDN'T REALIZE THAT WAS HAPPENING...!
DO YOU THINK I QUALIFY TO BE AN OPERATIVE...?
FWAPP

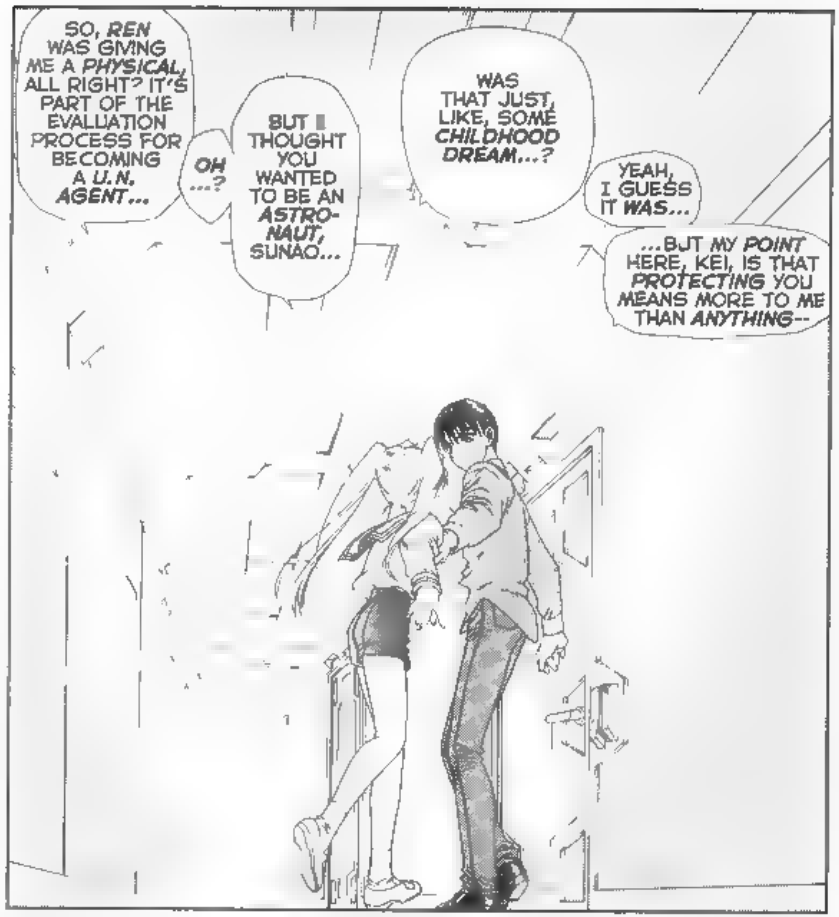
HEY, DURING THE BATTLE AT THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT LAB, YOU PROTECTED THE LITTLE LADY FROM A DAMN SENTINEL ATTACK, REMEMBER?
FWHOOSH!
GYAAA
VORPP
I TOLD YOU TO GET THE HELL OUTTA THERE, BUT YOU JUST WENT AHEAD AND BLEW THAT MOTHER AWAY.
AA!!
WHROOM!
MOST CIVILIANS WOULD'VE BEEN PARALYZED WITH FEAR, PROBABLY WOULDN'T HAVE EVEN BEEN ABLE TO RUN AWAY...
...BUT NOT YOU, MY BOY. EVEN KNOWING YOU DIDN'T STAND A CHANCE, YOU JUMPED RIGHT INTO THE ACTION. AND THEN, WHEN YOU SAW YOUR PRETTY FRIEND M-ZAK GET ALL SLICED AND DICED, YOU DIDN'T EVEN FLINCH.
OH...NOW I UNDERSTAND.
THAT'S REALLY SOMETHING, KIDDO, FOR SOMEONE WHO'S NEVER BEEN IN COMBAT BEFORE.

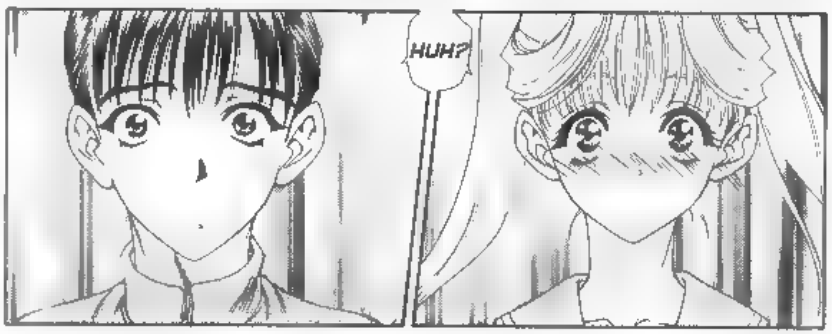
THOSE ARE YOUR QUALIFI-CATIONS, SUNAO.
HMM... TO NOTICE ALL THAT, UNDER THOSE CONDITIONS... NO WONDER M-ZAK WAS SO IMPRESSED WITH THIS REN FELLOW...!
UNDER-STAND WHAT I'M SAYING? GOOD! NOW SHOW ME THOSE PEARLY WHITES, HUH?
SUNAO! THAT SILLY ATTIM'S RUN OFF AND-
KCHA
LET'S GO, KEI!
AH ...!
N-NO...! STOP!
LET GO OF ME ...!
I CAN EXPLAIN EVERY-THING, KEI!
JUST TRUST ME, OKAY?
I... I WILL, SUNAO ...

YOU TESTED THE PROFESSOR, DIDN'T YOU, REN?
YOU WANTED TO SEE IF HE'D CHANGE SIDES, IF HE'D SWITCH ALLE-GIANCES FROM THE J.N. TO THE DYKSTRA CORPRATION...
ORDERS FROM ON HIGH, COMPRENDE? TOO BAD FOR OL' DOC HEIDEMANN, BUT...
...IF WE FIND OUT THAT HE WILL INDEED RUN OFF TO DYKSTRA, THEN, WELL...
...OUR BOSSES DON'T CARE MUCH FOR TURNCOATS, Y' KNOW. "JUST RESOLVE THE SITUATION, REN," THEY TOLD ME.

Act 56

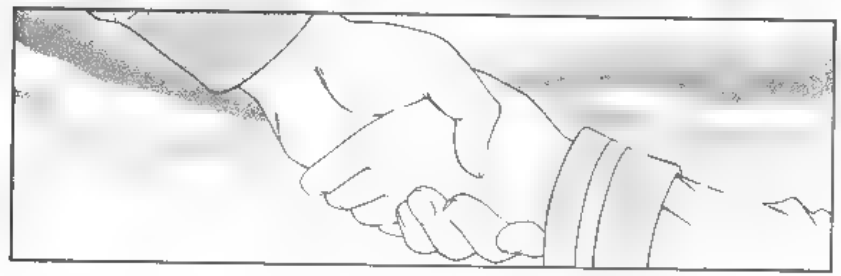

SO NOW YOU'RE EXPENDABLE, EH, PROFESSOR?
HOW PREDICTABLE OF OUR OH-SO-TERRIBLY-ETHICAL EMPLOYERS...BUT AT LEAST WE NOW HAVE THE TRAIT OF EXPENDABILITY IN COMMON, DON'T WE?
WE SHOULD COMPARE NOTES, YOU AND I...
S-SUNAO ...DON'T PULL SO HARD...!
OW ...!
W-WAIT... SLOW DOWN, SUNAO...!
P-PLEASE ...?
SUNAO... YOU'RE HURTING ME...!


SO, REN WAS GIVING ME A PHYSICAL, ALL RIGHT? IT'S PART OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS FOR BECOMING A U.N. AGENT...
OH ...?
BUT I THOUGHT YOU WANTED TO BE AN ASTRO-NAUT, SUNAO...
WAS THAT JUST, LIKE, SOME CHILDHOOD DREAM...?
YEAH, I GUESS IT WAS...
...BUT MY POINT HERE, KEI, IS THAT PROTECTING YOU MEANS MORE TO ME THAN ANYTHING--


HUH?

YOU REMEMBER THAT I WANTED TO BE AN ASTRO-NAUT...?
PRO-TECT-ING ME... MEANS MORE THAN ANY-THING...?

HEH, HEH ...
HEE, HEE, HEE ...



KLIK
BA MM
ACHAS

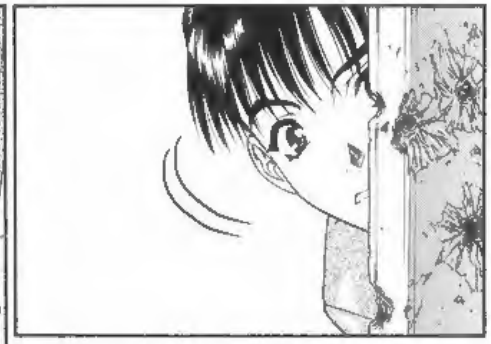
CHOOM
SLAMM
SPAK
SPAK
SPAK
SPAK
SPAK
SKRKK

KREEEEEEEK

KLANGG

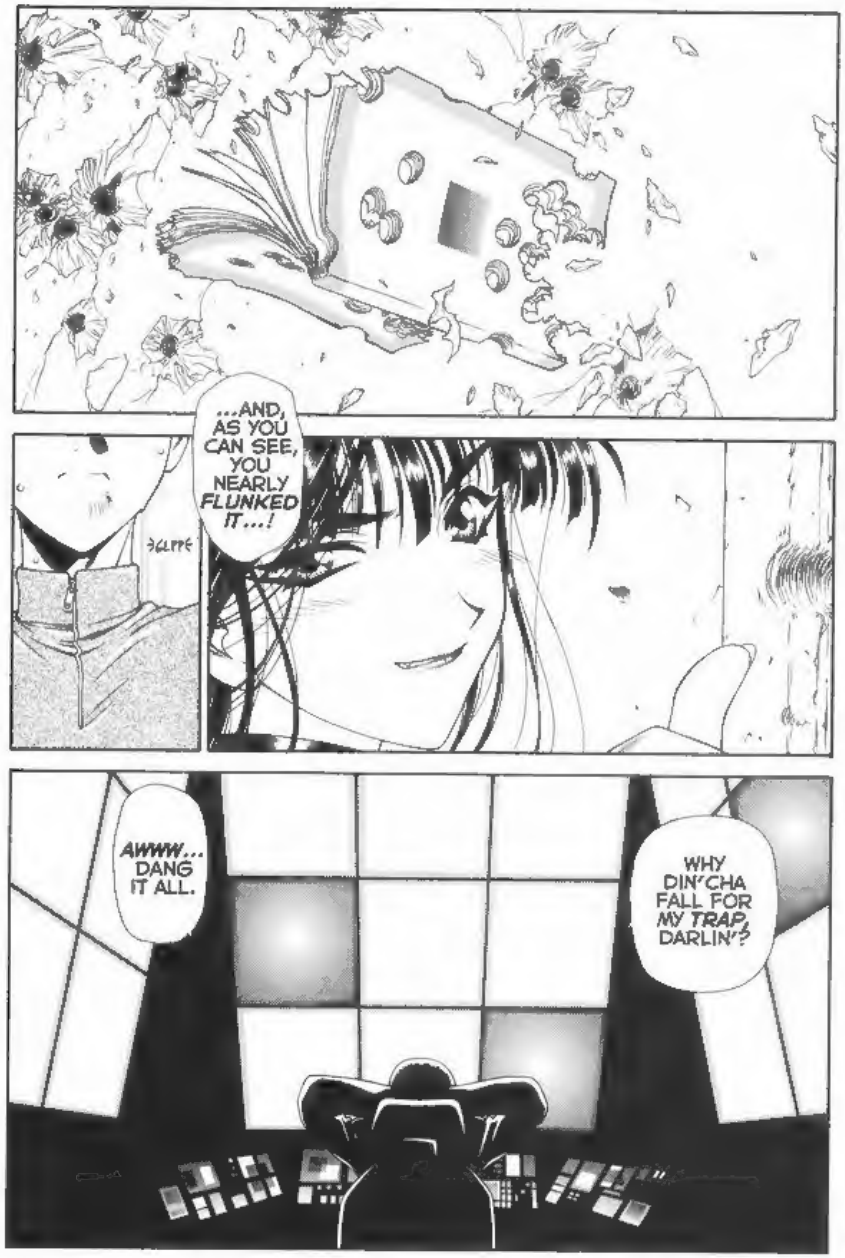
WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT --?!
KEI! STAY BACK HERE WITH NURSE HISHIKA, OKAY?
HUH, ...?

W-WHOA ...! WHAT JUST HAP-PENED, HERE...?



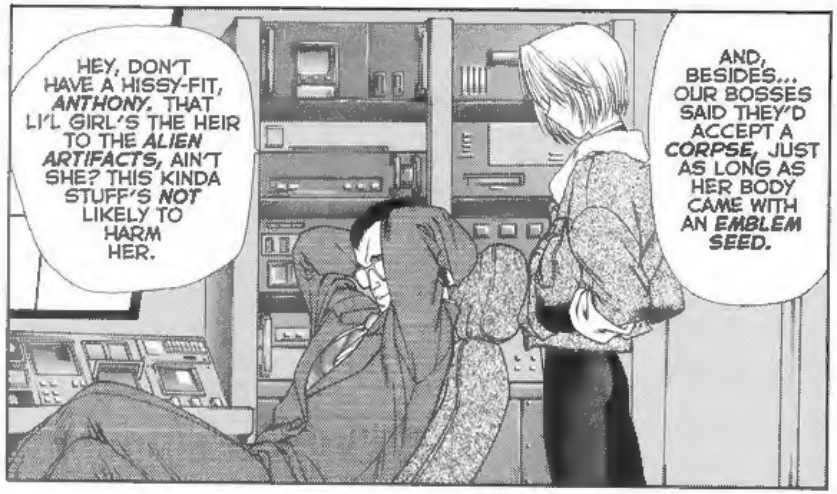
GET BACK --!
SKWIPP
URK

YOU'RE GETTING THAT *FIELD TEST I* MENTIONED A *BIT* SOONER THAN ANTICIPATED, SUNAO...
SWEET & DISH
FWIPP
cHOOOM
!


...AND, AS YOU CAN SEE, YOU NEARLY *FLUNKED IT...!*
AWWW... DANG IT ALL.
WHY DIN'CHA FALL FOR *MY TRAP*, DARLIN'?

BUT, HEY... I'M DANCING WITH THE SCARLET ANGEL, AIN'T I?
NO WAY SHE'D BE SO EASILY SUCKERED IN...
PING
YEAH?
IT'S HAIDRO-BUTTE. OPEN UP, STRAY.
BEEP
TSK
DAMN, KID... EVER EVEN THOUGHT OF SAYING "PLEASE"?
!

STILL YOUR SAME DIS-GUSTING SELF, I SEE...
HUH? OH, RIGHT... SORRY TO BREAK YOUR PRECIOUS PUPPETS.
BUT, HEY, I NEVER KNOW WHEN YOUR LI'L NEURO-THREADS ARE GONNA JUST ROT AWAY, DO I?
!
WHAT? YOU BOOBY-TRAPPED THE CABIN?
YOU MIGHT'VE KILLED KEI HEIDEMANN ...!


HEY, DON'T HAVE A HISSY-FIT, ANTHONY. THAT LI'L GIRL'S THE HEIR TO THE ALIEN ARTIFACTS, AIN'T SHE? THIS KINDA STUFF'S NOT LIKELY TO HARM HER.
AND, BESIDES... OUR BOSSES SAID THEY'D ACCEPT A CORPSE, JUST AS LONG AS HER BODY CAME WITH AN EMBLEM SEED.

STRAY, YOU BASTARD... SHE'S THE MASTER'S SISTER-IN-LAW!
SO, WHAT'S UP WITH YOUR OTHER MARIO-NETTES?
HMM? OH, THEM?
THEY'RE REWRITING THE SHUTTLE'S FLIGHT PROGRAM AS WE SPEAK.

TO BE CONTINUED...!

SERAPHIC FEATHER

hiroyuki UTATANE | *toshiya* TAKEDA

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